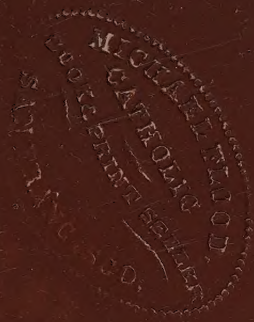


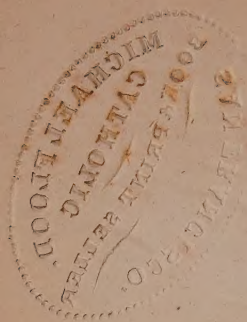
BIBLIOTHECA
FF. PREDICATORUM,
BENITIÆ.

No.

922
R

ST. ALBERT'S COLLEGE LIBRARY





1910

THE LIFE
OF
FATHER DE RAVIGNAN,
OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS.

BY
FATHER DE PONLEVOY,
OF THE SAME SOCIETY.

ST. ALBERT'S COLLEGE LIMERICK

Translated at St. Beuno's College, North Wales.

Property of

COSA

Please return to

NEW YORK Graduate Theological
THE CATHOLIC PUBLICATION SOCIETY,
126 NASSAU STREET. Union Library

1869.



*Ms. & V. Office of
Lithography*

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.



THE present work is a translation of the Life of F. de Ravignan, written in French by his friend and Superior, F. de Ponlevoy, and published at Paris in 1860. The interest felt in all that concerns the private character and public conduct of the great Christian orator is sufficiently evinced by the number of notices of his career which have appeared both in his own country and in England. These are of various merit, and are for the most part very meagre, containing little more than may be gathered from the published works of the subject of the notice. The publications of an author furnish, no doubt, the most authentic materials for the history of his life, so far as he has seen fit to disclose himself in his writings; but they are seldom sufficient to supply a complete view of his character.

In the case of F. de Ravignan, a life drawn from his writings must be more than usually incomplete.

Such a life is necessarily confined to what came before the public; but F. de Ravignan has left behind him the reputation of having presented an example of eminent Christian holiness, in thorough harmony with the age and country in which he lived; and the reader will naturally wish to learn whatever can be known of the details of such a life. F. de Ponlevoy was, during many years, an inmate of the same house with F. de Ravignan; and both as a religious Superior, and as an intimate friend, he had every opportunity of becoming thoroughly acquainted with the eminent man whose life he has written. He has made full use of his opportunities, and has taken pains to point out the principles of conduct and maxims of perfection which his narrative illustrates.

In the ninth Chapter, on the Conferences at Notre-Dame, the author points out the elements of the success which the great orator achieved, and of the influence exercised by him over the minds and hearts of every class: this analysis will be found useful by preachers and all public speakers.

It is hoped that the present volume will not be without value as an addition to our English Catholic literature, both historical and spiritual.

ST BEUNO'S, *December 1868.*



AUTHOR'S PREFACE.



THE Author of the present work feels it a duty to thank, in the name of the Society of Jesus and in his own, the writers whose kind and pious zeal has led them to hasten to do honour to the memory of F. de Ravignan. He has been assisted by their biographical researches ; and he would certainly not have taken up the pen had he been able to do no more than repeat a story already told with so much talent and power of arousing interest.

But it seemed both to himself and to others, that having been made by Divine Providence the intimate and confidential friend of the apostolic man who is the object of so much veneration and regret, he has incurred a new and peculiar obligation to give completeness to the history of his life, by relating what remained hidden in the secrecy of his heart and of his room.

This opinion has not been confined to himself and his Brethren : one of our most distinguished

Author's Preface.

critics,* in a notice written last year upon M. Ponjoulat's work, entitled "F. de Ravignan: His Life and Labours," says: "I will sum up the merits of this book by saying that it brings before us the external aspect of this character and life, while it leaves the task of completing the work for some heart more closely linked with the heart of F. de Ravignan."

It may truly be said, that in F. de Ravignan there were two men: the Apostle, fighting the battle of the Lord in the face of day; and the Religious, struggling against self, and seeking sanctification in secret. The former was great in the eyes of the world; the latter was yet greater in the eyes of God and his Brethren: and the importance of making this known was the greater, for it was the side of his character at once the less familiar to the world, and the more worthy of imitation.

The whole of the interior life of F. de Ravignan seems comprised in the expression which was his motto, *To suffer or to fight*. We shall be admitted to be present at the struggles of this soul, which was destined not to gain power over others except at the price of being itself subdued. St Ignatius, speaking of persons of strong and impetuous character, remarks: "One victory gained by them over themselves is to be preferred to an infinity of good works such as others perform without trouble, in accordance with their mild and easy disposition. They are in general the class best fitted for doing

* M. de Portmartin. See *L'Union*, Feb. 12, 1859.

great things in God's service when they direct their natural impetuosity to the pursuit of virtue. For they are not content with what is ordinary, but they are obstinate in resisting opposition, and never relax their efforts." We shall meet with a fresh application of this maxim in viewing the holy alliance of a great soul with humility, of impetuous vigour with patience, of energy and gentleness, of stirring zeal and prudent composure.

In order to give a more faithful picture of the example of force of character, tempered by virtue, which F. de Ravignan has left us, we have allowed him to paint himself in his conversation, his correspondence, and in the multifarious details of private life; in this way a character is seen completely and without disguise. He will therefore himself furnish the larger and most authentic part of his own history. We aim at nothing but to give truth and interest, and therefore add as little as possible of our own; perhaps the title of *Memoirs* might have been more suitably adopted for this publication.

It is hardly necessary to say that, in speaking of the Religious, we do not forget the Apostle. We present F. de Ravignan to the reader in all the circumstances to which he was led by his zeal; in the pulpit of Notre-Dame, in the struggles he maintained on behalf of the Church and the Society, in his intercourse with the men of his time eminent in the political and literary worlds; and thus his public life throws light on his private character; and seeing him mixed up with the

turmoil of the world without letting his heart be engaged, we shall the better appreciate the peace of his own room.

In telling the story of this life under its various aspects, we have had the advantage of using the materials found in F. de Ravignan's own manuscript remains, and in the archives of the Society both in Paris and Rome; and moreover, a very great number of private letters have been placed at our disposal. We desire now to express our gratitude to the persons who have shown so much readiness in putting these letters into our hands.

PARIS, *Feb. 2, 1860.*
Feast of the Purification of our
Blessed Lady.





CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL.

PAGE

GUSTAVE XAVIER DE RAVIGNAN, A CHILD IN BAYONNE, A STUDENT IN PARIS—HIS FIRST COMMUNION—HIS FA- THER'S DEATH, ...	I
--	---

CHAPTER II.

THE SOLDIER AND THE MAGISTRATE.

GUSTAVE DE RAVIGNAN, LIEUTENANT OF CAVALRY, COUN- SELLOR OF THE ROYAL COURT OF PARIS, DEPUTY PRO- CUREUR DU ROI—VOCATION—MYSTERIOUS DEPARTURE, ...	18
--	----

CHAPTER III.

RETIREMENT AT ISSY.

GUSTAVE DE RAVIGNAN MAKES KNOWN HIS ENTRY AT THE SEMINARY—RECEIVES THE TONSURE—FIRST THOUGHTS OF MONTROUGE—HE RENOUNCES HIS PROPERTY, ...	42
---	----

CHAPTER IV.

NOVICIATE AT MONTROUGE.

	PAGE
ARRIVAL OF THE ABBÉ DE RAVIGNAN AT MONTROUGE—ENTRY ON RELIGIOUS LIFE—HIS FIRST SERMONS, HIS VOWS, .	60

CHAPTER V.

SCHOLASTICATE.

BR. DE RAVIGNAN BEGINS HIS THEOLOGICAL STUDIES AT PARIS—COMPLETES THEM AT DÔLE—IS RAISED TO THE PRIESTHOOD—ORDINANCES OF JUNE 16, 1828, . . .	81
---	----

CHAPTER VI.

PERIOD OF TEACHING.

F. DE RAVIGNAN TEACHES THEOLOGY—HIS PERIL DURING THE ATTACK ON SAINT-ACHEUL IN 1830—EXILE IN SWIT- ZERLAND—RETREATS FOR THE CLERGY, . . .	91
---	----

CHAPTER VII.

THE THIRD YEAR OF PROBATION.

F. DE RAVIGNAN IN THE SCHOOL OF THE EXERCISES—RURAL MISSIONS—HIS THOUGHTS ON ENTERING PUBLIC LIFE, .	108
---	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

VARIOUS WORKS.

F. DE RAVIGNAN MINISTER AT SAINT-ACHEUL—SUPERIOR AT BORDEAUX—HIS EARLIEST STATIONS—HIS GOVERNMENT, .	119
---	-----

CHAPTER IX.

CONFERENCES AT NOTRE-DAME.

	PAGE
F. DE RAVIGNAN'S PLAN—HIS CORRESPONDENCE WITH F. ROTHAAAN—HIS RETREATS—THE STYLE OF HIS ELOQUENCE, ...	134

CHAPTER X.

ADVENT STATIONS AND DETACHED SERMONS.

F. DE RAVIGNAN TAKES HIS LAST VOWS AT LYONS—PILGRIMAGE TO LOYOLA—MISSION TO ROME—FUNERAL SERMON ON MGR. DE QUÉLEN—DISCOURSE IN PRESENCE OF QUEEN MARIE-AMÉLIE—CONVERSIONS OF RUSSIAN SCHISMATICS, ...	167
---	-----

CHAPTER XI.

THE PERSECUTION IN 1843 AND 1844.

PUBLIC OPINION DIRECTED AGAINST THE JESUITS—M. GUIZOT SENDS FOR F. DE RAVIGNAN—CHARGE AGAINST HIM AT ROME—ENDEAVOUR TO SEPARATE HIS CAUSE FROM THAT OF HIS BRETHREN—PUBLICATION OF HIS DEFENCE OF THE SOCIETY.	187
--	-----

CHAPTER XII.

PERSECUTION CONTINUED IN 1845.

F. DE RAVIGNAN CONVEYS TO THE CHAMPIONS OF THE SOCIETY THE THANKS OF F. GENERAL—HE VISITS VALS AND THE TOMB OF ST FRANCIS REGIS—HE ATTENDS THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES ON THE 2D AND 3D OF MAY—PLAN OF LEGAL RESISTANCE—M. ROSSI: HIS NEGOTIATIONS AT ROME—LETTER OF F. DE RAVIGNAN TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF PARIS—JUBILEE AT LIÈGE, ...	214
--	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

ILLNESS OF 1846.

	PAGE
F. DE RAVIGNAN FINDS PLEASURE IN SICKNESS—TEACHES SACRED ELOQUENCE AT VALS—CORRESPONDENCE WITH M. MOLÉ—HIS RESIGNATION TO THE WILL OF HIS SUPERIORS—REVISION OF THE TOULOUSE CONFERENCES—HE SPENDS A SEASON AT EAUX-BONNES—NOTRE-DAME DE FRANCE—HE TRAVELS IN ITALY—DEVOTEDNESS OF MME. DE LA FERRONNAYS—HE RETURNS TO PARIS, .	256

CHAPTER XIV.

RESIDENCE IN THE RUE DE SÈVRES.

REVOLUTION OF 1848—M. DE CHATEAUBRIAND ON HIS DEATHBED RETRACTS PARTS OF HIS WRITINGS—F. DE RAVIGNAN RECOVERS HIS HEALTH AT BIÈVRE—THE GENERAL OF THE SOCIETY VISITS PARIS—F. DE RAVIGNAN SUPERIOR OF THE HOUSE IN THE RUE DE SÈVRES, .	301
---	-----

CHAPTER XV.

MISCELLANEOUS DISCOURSES.

F. DE RAVIGNAN REAPPEARS IN THE PULPIT—HOMILIES ON THE PASSION AT ST THOMAS OF AQUIN—LAST TWO RETREATS AT NOTRE-DAME—MISSION TO LONDON—CONNECTION WITH THE CATHOLICS OF ENGLAND, .	325
--	-----

CHAPTER XVI.

CONVERSIONS.

GENERAL DONNADIEU—M. ROYER-COLLARD, PROFESSOR IN THE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE—PRINCE PAUL OF WIRTEMBERG—BARON WALCKENAËR—M. DU CAMPER, THE NAVAL OFFICER—GENERAL THE DUKE DE BELLUNE—THE DUKE DE GRAMONT—TWO ACTRESSES, . . .	341
---	-----

CHAPTER XVII.

CONGREGATION OF THE CHILDREN OF MARY.

	PAGE
ORIGIN OF THE ASSOCIATION—MEETINGS AT THE HOUSE OF MME. DE SWETCHINE—DIRECTION OF THE CHILDREN OF MARY ENTRUSTED TO F. DE RAVIGNAN BY THE BISHOP OF ORLEANS—RETREATS IN THE RUE DE VARENNES— MARSHAL DE SAINT-ARNAUD AND M. DE SALVANDY ATTEND SECRETLY—DEATH OF MME. SOSTHÈNE DE LAROCHÉFOUCAULD, ...	363

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DIRECTION OF SOULS.

F. DE RAVIGNAN'S VIEWS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE: THEY ARE LOFTY, PRACTICAL, AND SOLID—HIS ZEAL THAT SOULS SHOULD MAKE ADVANCEMENT—CHARACTER OF HIS DIRECTION—A RELIGIOUS VOCATION SANCTIONED BY HEAVEN, ...	380
--	-----

CHAPTER XIX.

INTERCOURSE WITH VARIOUS PERSONS.

GENERAL VIEW OF THE AMOUNT AND NATURE OF THE COR- RESPONDENCE KEPT UP BY F. DE RAVIGNAN, AND OF THE VISITS PAID OR RECEIVED BY HIM—HIS OWN ROOM AND THE PARLOUR, ...	407
---	-----

CHAPTER XX.

HIS SHARE IN RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS.

F. DE RAVIGNAN AVOWS HIS SYMPATHY WITH A PERSECUTED CHURCH—HE DEFENDS THE DOCTRINE OF THE IMMACU- LATE CONCEPTION: ASSISTS IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE ORATORY—BEGINNINGS OF

THE MONASTERY OF THE PIERRE-QUI-VIRE—MEMORIAL IN FAVOUR OF FREEDOM FOR THE MISSIONS TO THE ALGERINE ARABS—DISCUSSION ON THE LAW FOR FREE- DOM OF INSTRUCTION: THE LAW CARRIED INTO EXECU- TION—THE COLLEGES AT METZ AND SAINT-ETIENNE—F. DE RAVIGNAN HAS AN AUDIENCE WITH THE EMPEROR,	434
---	-----

CHAPTER XXI.

SICKNESS IN 1852.

ANXIETY AND ALARM OF THE PHYSICIANS—SELF-DEVOTION OF SŒUR ROSALIE—DR RÉCAMIER'S COURSE OF TREAT- MENT—F. DE RAVIGNAN CONVALESCENT AT VERSAILLES —DEATH OF MARSHAL EXELMANS—SPIRITUAL EXERCISES FOLLOWED BY INTERNAL TRIALS—JOURNEY TO ANGERS —RETURN TO PARIS AND SUDDEN RECOVERY,	462
---	-----

CHAPTER XXII.

DEATH OF F. ROOTHAAN.

F. ROOTHAAN RECOMMENDS F. DE RAVIGNAN TO WRITE HIS APOLOGY FOR CLEMENT XIII. AND CLEMENT XIV.—HIS DEATH—F. DE RAVIGNAN GOES TO ROME FOR THE ELEC- TION OF HIS SUCCESSOR,	484
---	-----

CHAPTER XXIII.

APOSTOLATE TO GREAT AND POOR.

THE VICTORIOUS COMMANDER AT THE ALMA BECOMES A PENITENT OF F. DE RAVIGNAN, AND DIES A CHRISTIAN DEATH—F. DE RAVIGNAN PREACHES THE LENT AT THE TUILERIES, AND AT THE HOUSE OF THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR,	512
--	-----

CHAPTER XXIV.

DEALINGS WITH PROTESTANTS.

	PAGE
METHOD FOLLOWED BY F. DE RAVIGNAN IN INSTRUCTING AND CONVERTING PROTESTANTS—HIS CHARITY, PRU- DENT FORBEARANCE, VIGOUR IN OPPOSING DIFFICULTIES —VARIOUS EXAMPLES, ...	531

CHAPTER XXV.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES.

THE SACRED HEART—THE VISITATION—THE CARMELITES, ...	547
---	-----

CHAPTER XXVI.

HIS INTERIOR LIFE.

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES—DOMINANT THOUGHTS—HIS TENDEN- CIES, THE ROADS HE WALKED, HIS TRIALS, ...	561
--	-----

CHAPTER XXVII.

GENERAL SKETCH OF F. DE RAVIGNAN.

ACCOUNT OF HIS PORTRAIT : HIS FEATURES, BEARING, LAN- GUAGE, AND HABITS—HIS CHARACTER : MODEST, VIGOR- OUS, AND AFFECTIONATE—DEATHS OF SOME OF HIS FRIENDS, ...	595
--	-----

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LAST SICKNESS.—SAINT-ACHEUL.

F. DE RAVIGNAN'S JOY AT LEAVING PARIS—HIS FOREBODINGS —COMMENCEMENT AND FIRST STAGE OF HIS SICKNESS— THE INFIRMARY IN THE NOVICIATE—DECEITFUL RECO- VERY AND RETURN TO PARIS—RETREAT GIVEN TO THE CARMELITES IN THE RUE DE MESSINE, ...	616
---	-----

CHAPTER XXIX.

HIS DEATH.

PAGE

F. DE RAVIGNAN IS TAKEN ILL IN HIS CONFESSIONAL IN PARIS—PASSES HIS LAST DAYS IN SOLITUDE—JOURNAL OF HIS SICKNESS—HIS LAST LETTERS—VISITS PAID TO HIM—THE LAST SACRAMENTS—HIS AGONY, . . .	637
---	-----

CHAPTER XXX.

HIS FUNERAL.

THE BODY IS PUBLICLY EXPOSED DURING THREE DAYS—EX- TRAORDINARY GATHERING OF VISITORS—THE SIMPLE BUT GRAND PROCESSION—FUNERAL SERVICE AT SAINT- SULPICE—DISCOURSE BY THE BISHOP OF ORLEANS—THE CEMETERY OF MONT-PARNASSE, . . .	673
--	-----





CHAPTER I.

AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL.

Gustave Xavier de Ravignan, a Child in Bayonne, a Student in Paris—His first Communion—His Father's Death.



THE lofty character of De Ravignan, and his humble position as a religious, allow us to make no account in his case of the advantages which, without merit of his own, he derived from birth and fortune. He was of himself sufficiently noble, and had he even had no ancestors of renown, would have been illustrious.

However, we may here mention one anecdote, which brings before us a striking contrast. When Henry IV. was king only of Navarre, and head of the Protestant faction, in one of those epochs of confusion when it is less difficult to do one's duty than to know it, a Baron de Ravignan was the correspondent and confidential agent of that monarch, an honour enjoyed by him on condition of abetting the heresy. At that time then the name of De Ravignan was found among the enemies of Catholicism. But the Church was to have its turn, and the Jesuit has well discharged the debt incurred by his pious and noble family.

The life of this true Christian has a uniform character of suffering. At his first entrance into the world, sorrow presented itself as his companion along the toilsome road to heaven. Even before birth he came near to death, and was already marked with the sign of the Cross before his Baptism. Just before the critical hour, his mother had been seized by a malignant putrid fever: given up by the physicians, and at the point of death, she begged to see once again her three elder children at her bed-side, and having cleansed her parched and feverish lips with the juice of an orange, she gave, as she deemed, her parting kiss and blessing to three orphans. The resignation of a Christian was not separated from the tenderness of the mother, and she knew how to make to God the sacrifice of herself and of her yet unborn child.

But Heaven was guarding the child of benediction, and death respected the mother.

In the public registry of the city of Bayonne, an entry of birth may still be read in the following terms:—

“This day, the 11th Frimaire, in the fourth year of the Republic, One and Indivisible, Bernard Paul Lacroix Ravignan, President of the Municipality of the Commune, and residing therein, aged 59, presented himself before the municipal officer, and declared to me that Catherine Rose Henrietta Mel Saint-Céran, his lawful wife, was delivered yesterday, at about six in the evening, at her place of abode in the Rue Neuve, of a male child, whom he presented to me, and to whom he has given the name of Gustave Xavier.”

The child, born on the 1st of December 1795, was baptized on the day when the Church celebrates the feast of St Francis Xavier, and the grateful mother herself it was who conceived the idea of bestowing on her rescued son this name, so

full of presage. The day will come when they will remind her of this. For a time, however, Gustave will be the name used within the family circle ; he will be known in religion by the name of Xavier. After two years' interval, we may again read, in the register of the cathedral of Bayonne, another entry to the following effect :—

“In the year 1797, and on the 21st day of April, I, the undersigned priest, supplied the ceremonies of Baptism to Xavier Lacroix Ravignan, born the 1st of December 1795, legitimate son of Bernard Lacroix and Catherine Lacroix, residents at Bayonne ; godfather, Jean Hippolyte Lacroix ; god-mother, Amélie Marie Lacroix.

“PAUL BENEDICT NOGUEZ,
“Non-juring Priest.”

This concluding ceremony of religion had to be performed by stealth. The evil days had not as yet run out their course, and God was an outlaw on French soil in the name of liberty. There were no solemn rites in the Church, nor even pious observances at home. A place of meeting had been agreed upon—a back room in the house of a watchmaker of the town. Such was the sanctuary in which the faithful priest, himself once a religious, supplied the ceremonies used in Baptism to one who was destined to be a religious. The child, now two years old, had for his sponsors a brother who was only four, and a sister seven, years of age. The future will shortly open out very different careers to these three children, now united by the double tie of blood and of faith ; the Court will summon Marie Amélie ; the camp Jean Hippolyte ; while the name of Jesus, emblazoned on the standard of the Cross, will summon Gustave Xavier. But their hearts are not divided, even though their fortunes separate them ; and time, without ever

lessening the tender love for the brother, will see veneration for the priest grow up.

The delicate child continued, as he had begun, to hang, and, so to speak, tremble in the balance between life and death. Each day brought fresh alarms. Vaccination, too, under the circumstances, came in its turn to increase the danger. After this operation, then so lately introduced, his condition continued critical without intermission for two months. At length, after many hair-breadth escapes, there came a respite at least, and nature was able to resume its regular course.

But Providence, skilful in keeping the balance, secretly, and by means of what appeared to be hindrances, was ever at work, with unerring hand, tracing thus early the outlines of the future. In that puny body there dwelt a great soul; the spirit seemed to gain strength from the very weakness of the flesh, and the slower the development of his constitution the more rapid was the formation of his character. While, in obedience to nature's teaching, the mother herself was giving suck to her child, she noticed that the boy would already take part, after his own fashion, in the conversations going on around him, and that he would even tear himself away from the breast to turn towards the speakers with an air of intelligence, in which they seemed to discern the dawn of thought. Soon he was to be seen by turns gay and grave, equally at his ease in either character: with children he was, like them, a child; with his relatives, giving foretaste of his future seriousness. He had not reached his eighth year when he would stand motionless during a whole evening at the whist-table, by his mother's side, following the course of the game, and gently calling back her attention to the cards when it had wandered. A lady of Saint-Laurent, one of the country-seats of the family, situated at

some six miles distance from Bayonne, still remembers the severe rebuke which this infant preacher once gave her for having disobeyed her parents. Thus, from the first, did a sense of duty hold sway in the mind of the future orator of Notre-Dame, and his every word carried authority.

These first years, the placid dawn of a life of labour, flowed by quickly and quietly in the bosom of his family, now at Bayonne, now at Saint-Laurent. The little Gustave was the constant companion of his aged father in his town walks and country rambles. The distance which separated them in years brought their hearts together. The good father could not bear to be separated from this child of benediction, whom he christened his *little companion*, as in turn the child, in his simplicity, called his father his *big companion*. This precocious gravity, so entirely characteristic of the boy, earned for him at home a *sobriquet*. On seeing him come near, they would say, "*Here is our little ambassador.*" At one time there was some reason for thinking that this pleasantry was prophetic, for the thoughts of this *little ambassador*, when he was grown up, turned for a moment towards the diplomatic career.

The child, gifted with intelligence beyond his years, had been sent to school very young. At the establishment of the worthy schoolmaster at Bayonne, a custom was prevalent, which doubtless was of old standing. On stated days the scholars competed for a writing prize, and when the prescribed portion was finished, the young rivals would run out into the streets and squares, and submit it to the criticism of passers-by and loungers whom they chanced to meet with; each boy would cry up the merits of his master-piece, and victory was at last assigned to him who carried off the largest number of votes. Gustave was conspicuous for his spirit of emulation, but his zeal never caused him

to forget gravity. He was fond, before school, of walking up and down alone under the old colonnades of Bayonne, his two hands in the pockets of the little frock-coat, which was then in fashion for boys of his age. This child had in truth the bearing of a man.

Soon, however, the day came when he must pass from school to college, and Gustave must for the first time offer the sacrifices which partings involve. This sad first taste of life, how many tears did it not cost him ! The Baron de Ravignan himself took his *little companion* with him to Paris, and stayed there some months to accustom his son to, and prepare himself for, a separation which he had a presentiment would be a long one. Alas ! the separation was longer much than had been foreseen ; the aged father parted from his son never to see him more. Still, though distant from the family hearth, the youth was in a sense at home. At school, he regained the company of his elder brother, and the godson and godfather were dwelling under one roof, confided to the watchful care of their maternal grandmother, Madame de Mel de Saint-Céran, a very pattern of a mother in affection and piety.

The school which brought the two brothers once more together, situated at first at the end of the Rue du Cherche-Midi, on the Boulevard des Invalides, and later on removed to the Estrapade, was under the direction of M. l'Abbé Hunot, afterwards curé of one of the parishes of the capital, and canon of the Metropolitan Chapter. It numbered only a score of pupils ; yet this group of children contained much future eminence in the bud. A strange companionship ! the name of Feutrier was side by side with that of De Ravignan. Who could have foreseen at that time the political game about to be played out, and the terrible revenge that God was preparing to take ?

To proceed ; Gustave was well able to choose his friends from among his schoolfellows ; tact supplied in him the want of experience. A frank and pure affection speedily united two youths whose families had long been united by social position and congenial principles. We have a memorial of this intimacy which became an heir-loom, in that Monsieur le Marquis de Dampierre wrote the first memoir of his father's old friend. It was the privilege of Father de Ravignan that the friendships he formed were lasting. Others attached themselves to him as much as he to them, and he loved without thought of self, and with a devotedness that knew of no reserve. We shall see that almost all the companions of his boyhood became doubly friends of his when they made themselves his spiritual children ; and without losing the easy familiarity of former days, they surrounded him to the end with their grateful veneration. When friendship is consecrated by religion, it is like charity, deathless.

On his first entrance at the college, the younger brother was naturally placed under the sheltering wing of his elder brother. All the scholars studied the rudiments of Latin together, without any distinct gradation of classes. The zeal of the new pupil soon raised him above the common level, and the last in years made himself the first in merit. The professor, disconcerted at this premature progress, which upset the arrangement of the lessons, could only attribute it to undue pressure on the part of the elder brother, and Gustave was the very innocent occasion of Hippolyte's being well scolded for something of which he was equally innocent.

Hard student as he was, the child readily gave to his games the same enthusiasm as he had for study. One Sunday he was invited with his brother to spend the day at the house of the well-

known Madame Récamier, who was a friend of the family. Just before dinner he was running about the garden, and managed to tumble into a pond ; the servants had much trouble in dressing him again in time for table.

Providence had made good provision in Paris for the Bayonne child. His grandmother watched over the deposit committed to her. The works of Madame de Mel de Saint-Céran are perhaps her best eulogy. She was one of those souls whom God provides against days of trial, whom persecution only renders more faithful and more devoted, who are the consolation of the Church in time of distress, and who remain constant near the tomb where the Saviour slumbers until the dawn of the Resurrection. France, it is well known, is prolific in women devoted to the work of reparation, no less than in men full of the apostolic spirit ; and, verily, nothing less than this was needed to expiate the wrongs we had done, to repair the disasters we had suffered, to compensate evil by good, and to set our country right in the scales of God's justice. Madame de Saint-Céran, with the assistance of some ladies worthy to be called her friends, gave the opportunity of education to the venerable M. Landrieux, whose name is still popular in Paris. And do we not in some degree owe F. de Ravignan to her fostering care ? This work alone is enough to make her crown of glory sure. Every Sunday the two brothers left their school and passed the holiday under the influence of religion. Their rest became more happy by becoming more holy. The pious grandmother, who at that time lived in the Rue Paradis, herself took her grandsons to Mass and Benediction at her parish church, Notre-Dame des Blancs-Manteaux. When the time came for the elder to enter the military school of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, she gave him a copy of the

“Imitation of Christ.” The young officer preserved this pious memorial throughout the great campaigns of the empire, and carried it with him as a protection on days of battle.

About this time, M. l’Abbé Frayssinous began, in what is called the German Chapel, a series of Conferences which led to the celebrated courses of Saint-Sulpice. Gustave with his companions joined these gatherings of young men, and, like the rest, had to furnish his professor with an analysis of the discourse. We are sorry not to have been able to find among the young school-boy’s papers a single one of these first exercises which the orator of Notre-Dame wrote in the school of the orator of Saint-Sulpice.

We may, however, quote some letters belonging to this first period of his life, letters full of simplicity and tenderness, and sometimes blotted with tears. In these scraps, though written with a view to a single day, we may yet see strength of will joined with delicacy of feeling.

“My dear papa, I will try my best to give you pleasure to make you some amends for your care of me and your sacrifices. I cannot help crying when I remember the time when I was your little companion in the country, and how often you came to look for me, though I was not far from you and dear mamma. But I will not talk of this any more, it makes me too unhappy. Good-bye, dear good papa, I can promise you that I love you with all my heart.”

“Ah, dear good papa, how I wish you still called me by the dear name of your *companion* as we walked in the woods round the Gurgue. How happy I was then! but it is all over. We must hope that some day I shall again visit the neighbourhood which I love so much, and where I was born. How tedious I find it to wait for the time!

Meantime, dear papa, my comfort is to write letters to you in which I tell you what I really feel.

"Your little companion who loves you with all his heart."

"I remember my room just as if I was there, and the garden and all the neighbourhood. I cannot tell you how attached I was to that quiet place, which I shall always take pleasure in thinking of. I naturally like being alone. How glad I should be to become your little companion again. I hope you will pardon the faults of which I have been guilty."

Do not these letters of a child of ten years old already give presage of F. de Ravignan's clearness of mind and strength of feeling?

Madame la Baronne de Ravignan came to Paris during the summer of 1806, in order to pass the holidays with her sons; and when school recommenced in November, she took them from the small college at the Estrapade, and placed them at a much larger one in the Rue de Matignon, near the Champs Elysées. Gustave, who was ever guarded in passing an opinion, thought it sufficient to write to his father, "Mamma has sent us to a college which I like well enough."

There was far from being then as much competition as now among establishments of this class: the one in question held a high rank both in reputation and in the number of its pupils, who amounted to more than three hundred. During this period of reconstruction, great confusion still prevailed in schools. More regard was had to appearance than to solidity, and religion was looked on as an optional matter. The head of the college gave balls in his own house, in which the pupils took part; he would take them to the theatre as to a literary exercise, and he gave himself little trouble about bad books being handed about in

the house. It is no rash judgment to believe that morality was not the most favourable point about a fashionable college. However, a child of eleven was able to take his stand, and keep it in the midst of circumstances so full of danger; to resist the falling away of some, the persuasions of others, the enticements of nearly all, and to preserve the spirit of faith and the love of duty. The contrast only brought out the strength of his character the more.

Here, again, he formed some friendships well chosen and lasting. But for child and man alike, the great security in every place and time is labour, joined with prayer. Gustave passed through four classes during his first year—the seventh, the sixth, the fifth, and the fourth—and he managed to be generally at the head. At the end of this well-filled year, no one disputed with him the prize for industry. The hard-working boy, according to the encyclopedic system of education, was forced to learn almost everything at once; and he took interest in everything, or at least set about it with spirit: English, German, drawing, music, dancing, fencing, swimming, riding. He liked sending word to his parents of the smallest advances he made in the most trifling points. Thus he wrote: “I am beginning to be able to swim almost by myself.” His object was to give them pleasure, not to boast. With the straightforwardness usual to him, he commonly ended his reports with this phrase, which means no more than it expresses: “I have reason to think that my masters are satisfied with me.”

His time, then, was well occupied, and the heart of the child was, moreover, otherwise protected. Religion already possessed his whole soul, and regulated all his feelings. The year 1809 was rendered ever memorable to him by his first Communion; with all the earnestness of his faith, he began long beforehand to prepare for so important

an event. At the very beginning of the year he wrote to his father: "I will not go again to the play, for my confessor has forbidden me to go there any more, under penalty of not making my first Communion. Ask Madame de Luçay to take Hippolyté there alone when she wishes. I take all these precautions to avoid committing a sacrilege."

It seems that this message was never delivered. At any rate, Gustave shortly after received a fresh invitation. At once he took up his pen, and this time he wrote to his mother with a determination perfectly admirable in so docile a child: "Madame de Luçay has had the goodness to send a servant to ask leave to take us to the play. I must tell you plainly that I have given up going. I beg you, then, to thank her heartily for me (I dare not do it myself) as soon as possible. If you are displeased at this, I am very sorry; but I don't mean to go, and I never will go. Pardon me, dear mamma, for speaking to you so freely, but I consider myself bound to, after what my confessor has said to me on religion; and my own opinion is the same."

These religious impressions are the constant topic of the letters which passed between Gustave and his family. Thus he wrote: "I am going to redouble my efforts to make myself acceptable to God at the time of my first Communion. I will endeavour to bring to this great act all the dispositions needed to make it well."

In the course of the month of May the child wrote again: "The time of my first Communion is drawing near, so that I make the most of my time, in order to have more leisure to read the good books which are to prepare me for the great action which I intend to perform on the 1st of June—the feast of Corpus Christi itself. It will certainly be a very happy day for me. But you will not be there; however, you will be in my heart, and may

God listen to the prayers of a poor child for a beloved father and mother." The ceremony, which had been first fixed for the 1st of June, was put off to the 8th. "I am not at all sorry at this," said Gustave, "for I shall have at least a little more time for preparation. . . . Till then, no more letters, for the nearer the day draws the more busy I am."

Accordingly, he sent nothing more to his parents except dutifully to beg their pardon, that he might be forgiven on earth as well as in heaven: "I write to you, my dear parents, chiefly to beg your blessing and your pardon for all the faults which I have committed against you, and for all the annoyance which I may have given you. For the future, I promise that you shall have no more cause of complaint against me. Pray for your little Gustave, my dear parents, that he may make his first Communion well."

The happy child did make his first Communion well, and the next day he sent an account of the ceremony, which took place at St Philippe de Roule: "Yesterday (Thursday, June 8th) I received Communion and Confirmation. The exhortation given us by the priest before the Communion made me cry a good deal, and at the time when I ought to have read the Acts, I could scarcely utter more than two lines, so much was I overcome. Another read them instead of me, and I had to withdraw. My dear parents, I did not forget you."

We will set down some more precious memorials of this distant moment. Gustave was truthful; self-love, the father of falsehood, had not corrupted him. He knew how to profit by admonition. "Your tender reproaches," he wrote to his father, "have had on me an effect which I cannot describe. I am, I confess, rather fond of spending money, though not to any great degree; for I

always make good use of my means. However, I will be as economical as I can; and what would I not do for so good a father, who deprives himself of everything for his children?" He was able also to endure failure, and a check redoubled his courage. "I don't know how it is," he said, after a competitive exercise, "that I have got down so low. No doubt it was some stupidity of mine. But it is another encouragement to me to redouble my efforts to finish my course well."

Gustave soon had need to resign himself in a most bitter trial. We can never live long in this world without having to weep over the graves of those we love. Mourning came to him early; when yet a child he lost his father. While this blow was yet fresh, he thus poured forth all his sorrow into the heart of his mother: "I am writing you a letter full of tears. Yesterday they told me the news that papa was dead. Although I had had some little preparation, it was a great blow to me. Well, it cannot now be helped, and we must accept our lot, however painful it may be. It is God's will. I am afraid of increasing your sorrow. Ah, how grieved you must have been! We have a good and tender mother still. O God, long preserve this dear mother for us, and grant her a long and happy life in the midst of her children! Please give me in your next letter a full account of the illness and death of my father, whom I loved so much. Of course there was time to give him the last Sacraments. This would be a great consolation to us, and I hope it was not neglected. Dear father, you shall not be forgotten at the altar; there I will offer fervent prayers to God for you and for my mother. He will listen, and will grant my request."

We may at once mention how persevering was his filial piety. When he was a priest, he frequently

said the requiem Mass for his parents ; and as often as he ascended the altar, he was heard to speak to God of his father and his mother.

La Baronne de Ravignan was now left alone, with embarrassed circumstances, and a numerous family. Her sorrow was unbounded and unceasing. Gustave was anxious to console her ; he reasoned with her, as only a child could do, trying to persuade her to be happy once again, to give happiness to her family. Then he added, with simple delicacy, " Pardon my freedom, the offspring of tenderness. If I have failed in due respect, I confess myself guilty ; to excuse myself, I run for refuge to your heart."

This honour for parents, the faithful guardian of love, and which formed an element in our old traditional manners, was not limited in the case of Gustave to mere forms of respect. Entering into his character and influencing his conduct, it came from his heart, and made him the most obedient and the most loving of children.

Marie-Amélie, his elder sister and godmother, who had married the General Exelmans, had just left Paris for the court of Naples, in quality of lady-in-waiting to the Queen Caroline, the sister to the Emperor Napoleon.

" Amélie's going," wrote Gustave, " gives me a pain which I cannot describe. It tears my heart to part with so good a sister. My heart can say no more ; it is swollen with grief."

Some time after, General Exelmans was setting off to join his wife in Italy, and he offered to take his young brother-in-law with him. The offer was full of attraction for the schoolboy of the Rue de Matignon. He was carried away with it ; but before accepting the invitation, he took advice. " I have not dared to speak to you," he wrote to his mother, " of a plan which fills my mind. I am

eager to carry it out; I have a great taste for travelling, and to travel in Italy is at once most agreeable and most instructive. I beg, I conjure you, not to refuse me this favour; at least, unless you think that it would stand in the way of my education. However, though my desire is so strong, it is for you to decide and to consider what is best for me; for I can do nothing except by your order and approbation; and this, I suppose, is the proper conduct of a well-behaved child towards a good and tender mother." The mother did not see fit to consent, and Gustave at once gave up his wish.

About the same time, another more subtle temptation came upon him. He was urged to accept a place as page in the household of the emperor. The road to fortune was open before him; but the prudent boy viewed the matter in quite a different light, and, after reflection, he gave a distinct answer: "I am resolved not to enter as a page; for this would be sure to lead to the army, a career which would not suit me at all. I am naturally disposed for quiet; the labours of the closet suit me, and my taste leads me to diplomacy." The sentence of the Gospel, *Quid prodest?* had not yet sounded in his heart as in that of Francis Xavier. But if God did not as yet call him interiorly by grace, Providence was even now directing his steps.

During all the years occupied by his earlier education, Gustave did not once return to his family. In those days, the journey from Paris to Bayonne was far from easy. So the young scholar passed his holidays in Paris itself; and he found them not dull, but a little monotonous. The grandson had the company of his grandmother. On some rare occasions, the venerable Abbé Rauzan, a friend of Madame de Mel de Saint-Céran, procured for him some little surprise. He would take the child with him on a visit to Saint-Germain-en-Laye. There,

in the old palace of the kings, which had been changed into a military school, Gustave again met his elder brother Hippolyte, and after a chat, he would rejoin his kind guide, who waited for him in the rooms of his brother, a surgeon of the establishment, a man of agreeable and popular manners.

That we may not have to return to the Rue de Matignon, which Gustave is just leaving, we will anticipate a little, to say a last word on the relations of the pupil with his master. Time brings about changes in men's positions and pursuits. After a period of prosperity, the head of the college fell into misfortune, and in his forlorn old age was forced to retire, poor and friendless, to Neuilly, having with him one only of his daughters to give him aid and comfort. One day this daughter heard some conversation about F. de Ravignan, who had become the apostle of Paris. Urged by filial piety, she sought an interview. "Do you still," she asked, "remember your old master?" "I shall never forget him," was the answer, "and I wish I could give him some proof of my gratitude." "I am," she replied, "his daughter; he is sick and in misery; you, and you only, can speak to his heart, and speak to him of God." F. de Ravignan hastened to the bedside of this old man of eighty. At the sight of a priest he seemed annoyed; but no sooner did he hear the voice than he exclaimed, "Ah, Gustave, is it you?" Tears followed, and submission. On that day the pupil had become the master.





CHAPTER II.

THE SOLDIER AND THE MAGISTRATE.

Gustave de Ravignan, Lieutenant of Cavalry, Counsellor of the Royal Court of Paris, Deputy Procureur du Roi—Vocation—Mysterious Departure.



USTAVE DE RAVIGNAN must now choose a profession. After a few slight and passing thoughts of the diplomatic career, his inclinations became fixed on the magistracy ; and he followed the bent of his mind. Under providential direction, he hereby made a step towards that ultimate employ of which he had as yet no suspicion. In the month of November 1813, he entered the chambers of M. Goujon, a lawyer of standing, who had been recommended to his mother by the noble and generous De Sèze, who had pleaded the cause of the King. At the same time he put his conscience under the direction of M. de Frayssinous, whom from that time he looked upon as a father. Heaven coupled their names together before associating them in the same work.

But the young law-student had soon to put off his studies to a more propitious moment. In the month of January 1814, he had an attack of weakness, due to the sudden rapidity with which, after some delay, his growth in stature had begun to proceed. Moreover, the law school was broken

up, on account of the desperate state of the empire. It was a good opportunity for a journey to the South. On March 11, he was present at the triumphant entry of Mgr. le Duc d'Angoulême into Bordeaux, and he partook in the enthusiasm of the royalist reaction. As soon as the Restoration had been brought about, he returned with his mother to Paris, there to recommence his peaceful pursuits.

But soon a new moment of danger tears the student from his chamber. This time he casts aside his law-books, and plunges into the thick of the fight. From the moment when he heard that Napoleon had landed on the coast of Provence, the ardent youth felt no hesitation. Despite the weakness of his constitution, despite his dislike for noise and adventure, he enlisted in the royal volunteers. With a chivalrous and now old-fashioned idea of good faith, he thought that honour required fidelity, and that conscience exacted devotedness; that personal interests must be sacrificed for the public good, and that, after all, to die for duty is to die for God. So he became a soldier. There were many others who pledged their honour by enrolling their names; but with many men it is one thing to promise, another to perform; and when once the time of action has arrived, the half will of cowardice never lacks excuses. The morning of March 19 saw but a small gathering of volunteers at the rendezvous. Gustave was one of the first to arrive, and the sight of this handful of men filled him with indignation, and yet at the same time it gave him courage; were he to stand alone, he would go forward. He returned to his mother's house cool yet enthusiastic, and more than ever resolved to make his protest, and to do service at least by dying. The time was short; he hurried over his preparations, and received Holy Communion on Easter Day; then, provided with the

blessing of God and of his mother, he darted from Paris and hastened into Spain.

The campaign was not fortunate. At the disastrous affair of Héletta, the young volunteer was near falling a victim to his heroic devotion. The King's forces had been surprised in an ambuscade, and were being overwhelmed by numbers. The unfortunate Barbarin, the officer in command, had received a wound, and in another minute would have been made prisoner and shot. Gustave observed his situation, went forward under the enemy's fire, and freely exposed his own person to rescue his chief; embracing him, he resolved to carry him out of the fight or to fall with him. The hapless general was urged by a generous sentiment to an act of desperation; he succeeded in freeing one of his arms, and, shooting himself through the head, left a corpse in the hands of the enemy. Gustave, covered with blood, dropped the body of his unfortunate officer, gave up the opportunity of a death which would be useless, and consented to seek safety in flight.

Alone, on foot, amidst a thousand dangers, he traversed the whole of the Basque country, passed the frontier, and reached the house at Saint-Laurent, his dear home in the quiet days of childhood. He arrived without a companion, and he found none to receive him. Worn out with fatigue he sought an asylum in the house of the excellent Dumaine, a trusted servant of the family, who was overjoyed at welcoming the son of his old master. However, far from being overcome by a first reverse, he sighed only after new conflicts. He allowed himself no more than three days' rest in the hospitable cottage; and after a private interview with the old curé, at ten o'clock on a Sunday evening, he set out again in the disguise of a peasant, accompanied by the two daughters of his host, and by

an old female servant. At an appointed spot in the middle of a wood he joined the company of a farmer, a trustworthy and honourable man, who was to be his guide as far as the Spanish frontier. Before setting out he wrote the following note, which reached its destination :—

“To-morrow I leave Saint-Laurent. Adieu, my best of mothers : my heart is a little sore, but religion cheers me. I shall hear Mass at a neighbour’s house, which I shall reach at break of day. I must go and get some sleep, the last perhaps for a long time, and certainly the last here. Good-bye. I love you more than my life.”

Gustave de Ravignan at length again joined the army, and entered the corps of royal volunteers who were under the command of M. le Comte Étienne de Damas. At the same time he received from Mgr. le Duc d’Angoulême a lieutenant’s commission in the cavalry. We shall find him hereafter still a soldier, with a change merely in the warfare he wages.

His trial came to an end. On July 17 the young officer wrote the following lines, dated from Saint-Jean-de-Luz :—“I am coming. I am on French soil. I am quite well. We have had but little to suffer. Now my task is done, I reckon on resuming my profession. I shall come back to you with the feeling that I have done my duty well. It has been a great grief to me to have been separated so far from you, but at least I have the consolation of having satisfied my conscience.” Nothing could excel this for loftiness and modesty of tone.

On July 19 he again wrote to his mother, dating this time from Bordeaux : “I have reached Bordeaux post-haste. I have been sent forward by my general, M. le Comte de Damas, to bring word of his approach. I am quite well, and am overjoyed at drawing near to you. I am a lieutenant in the

cavalry, and on the staff. I have no thought of continuing in the army." He made no account of one incident of his journey. Immediately on his reaching France in the suite of Mgr. le Duc de Bourbon, he received his confidential mission to Bordeaux, and started off as fast as his horse could carry him. At Mont de Marsan he dismounted to take breath, at the house of one of his mother's old friends. He fainted at the door, but recovering, he again mounted his horse and reached Bordeaux, if not covered with laurels, at least full of honour.

A last letter, still dated from Bordeaux, August 7, brings us to the end of the military period of this narrative, and introduces that of the magistracy: "To-morrow I start for Paris. How glad I am. I have not been able to write to you because of the duty on which I have been employed, which has consisted in doing nothing but receiving a constant succession of visitors. I have just received my lieutenant's commission. I shall never be happy until I am working for the King in my own room."

On his return to Paris, an attempt was made to persuade him to follow up the career which fortune had opened to him. Rank conferred in Spain would be preserved in France; thus his position was established, and he might be confident for the future. But he took counsel with God, questioned his own heart, and felt himself always moved to abide by his original choice of the magistracy. Mgr. le Duc d'Angoulême heard of this resolve of the young lieutenant, and spoke to him with the greatest kindness: "M. de Ravignan, I am very glad to see you again. I know that you will serve our country as well with the pen as with the sword."

Gustave dropped the character of an officer, and once more looked forward to being a magistrate. Wherever he was, his strong will, with the help

of his wonderful quickness, made him seem quite at home. He began his probation in court, and set about his work with new zeal, just as though nothing had happened to draw off his attention. To render himself perfect, he added the study of modern languages to that of law. He began German again; and having a friend who had been a prisoner in England, he took lessons in English from him in exchange for lessons which he gave in Latin. He varied these severe employments with drawing and music.

We cannot tell whether these labours were more than his strength could support, or whether occasional sickness was his destined lot, that his life might be a long course of toil and suffering. There was clearly one weak point in his constitution, and this was precisely the point on which the weight of his life of labour chiefly fell. In the winter of 1816 he had a serious attack of an affection of the chest. The season was unfavourable, his time of life critical, and grave apprehensions were entertained. His physician recommended a visit to Eaux Bonnes; so he went to pass the spring in the south, and wait for summer.

Sickness gave the young probationer time for reflection, and his thoughts were ever turned towards God. On May 10 he wrote from the Château de Ravignan: "I am left very much alone, which is quite a treat to me; and I should have done some work had my health allowed. I am not very well satisfied. I find a want of energy in my body, and, as a consequence, in my mind. God has sent me this trouble, and I bear it as best I may, but not very well, for it is so very like sloth; but do not think that this makes much impression on me; no. . . . I have formed, in general, a very good opinion of the country people here: religion is a willing inmate of their cottages, and is to them

everything, as it is to all honest men. I have got the idea that it is very silly to talk about politics. *O fortunatos nimium!* But I am napping now, and my awakening shall be that of a lion!"

Hunting was recommended to the invalid, and he took pleasure in it, for he did everything under a sense of duty. He was even heard to speak of his first success with a naïve expression of merriment. It is pleasant to study these touches of nature, and to recognise the playfulness of youth in a face which has put on the expression of mature age. When July came, after a few weeks' stay in the Pyrenees, his health was re-established. He was yet young, and the mountain air quickly repaired the damages his constitution had received.

Gustave returned to Saint-Laurent for the rest of the summer, and enjoyed some repose close to his father's grave. The 11th of September brought him a return of sorrow, and he wrote as follows to M. le Baron de Ravignan:—"The mournful anniversary which I kept this morning alone by the tomb of my father, has brought back to my mind all our dearest remembrances, and I cannot employ my evening better than in imparting to you the thoughts, melancholy indeed but full of sweetness, which have occupied the day. It is when the soul is deeply moved that, above all other times, thoughts of religion seem most suitable. You are no stranger to my feelings, my dear brother, I am assured; but here I found one motive more in being amidst the scenes where my father watched over my infancy, where in his old age he sank, where rest his precious remains. I caused a Mass to be said for that honoured soul, and I came away not without profit. It is now six years since we lost our father, and this is the first time that the 11th of September has found me in the neighbourhood where I was born, and where he

died. I have offered my thanks to Heaven that its designs agree so well with my wishes, and I have resolved to merit its favours by a course of conduct befitting the affection and the sorrow which I feel.

“Sorrow flies off on the wings of time, and throughout the year I have seen, and I still see, that we live without thinking of the past. Such are men !”

In 1817 a post of “*conseiller auditeur*” in the Royal Court of Paris fell vacant, and Gustave de Ravignan, who had nearly attained his legal full age, offered himself as a candidate. A reconstruction of the magistracy had just taken place, and these posts were reserved for young men selected from among those who were preparing for a judicial career. According to the regulations, the king made his nomination out of a list of three presented to him by the Court itself, in a general meeting held for the purpose. That a name should be entered on this list, it was necessary to secure a majority of votes in an assembly comprising more than fifty magistrates.

Who was this young man that, though unknown to all these grave judges, ventured to ask their suffrages? What had been his previous career, what recommendations had he, what were his claims? Every one asked himself this question. It was then known that the young Gustave de Ravignan, a junior brother of a noble family, the brother-in-law of the General Exelmans, with whose political sentiments, however, he was far from agreeing, almost immediately on leaving college had enlisted as a royal volunteer, and had during the Hundred Days followed the fortunes of the Duc d’Angoulême in Spain; the prince had fully appreciated his rare abilities and devoted valour, and on the Restoration had promised him his countenance in whatever

profession he should embrace. The young man had preferred the magistracy to the army, and his canvass had the support of the prince.

Such were the candidate's pretensions. But the opposition was keen, and argument only made it keener. Certainly it was noble devotion, said the magistrates of longest standing, but a camp is a poor school for a court of justice. Why did not the young man keep to his profession? At least, why should he be forced upon us?

In the minds of many, considerations of the interest and the dignity of the magistracy allied themselves with the feeling of independence, always so lively in large judicial bodies, to secure the rejection of the candidate in whose favour influence was used. However, the majority sided with the prince, and the name of Gustave de Ravignan was entered on the official list, though not in the first place. A royal ordinance at once established him in his seat on the bench. The new member was very coldly received by the seniors, and was attached as "conseiller auditeur," without any deliberative voice, to the first chamber of the Court, over which presided the First President, Séguier. But he did not lose his presence of mind at the want of favour shown him; while he awaited an opportunity of coming forth from his obscurity he was not wanting to himself, and made his preparations with calm energy, much more out of a sense of duty than from ambition to succeed. He will soon make an opening for himself; when once he can show himself he will attract the eyes of all.

The young counsellor began by drawing up a plan of study, and a time-table for the employment of the day. In this we may notice the depth of precision and solidity in this great and versatile character, in which strength of mind ruled and directed talent. We present the reader with the

substance; may this example serve as a lesson to the youth of our schools.

The plan of study bears on its front the old adage, *Non multa sed multum*. The order of the day is inscribed with the Christian motto, *Cum Deo*.

The industrious student of our laws divides his plan into two parts, *Theory* and *Practice*.

"The *theory* has two objects, the *substance* and the *form*, the science and the art, jurisprudence and literature.

"First object, the *substance* of the subject; the Code, its sources, and its interpreters. Begin with the treatises on Obligations and Contracts, joining therewith what relates to *Restitutio in integrum*; after this will come Successions and Testaments. First, I must read attentively the title of the Code, either in the book itself or in Delvincourt, then the corresponding title in Domat, with especial care fully to comprehend the introductions which he has prefixed to each title. Then it will be time to read the laws in the Digest and in the Code of Justinian, which belong to each title, taking care always to have the Civil Code open on the table. Everything must be applied to this, compared and weighed, and with it for guide, critical and supplementary remarks may be made on Domat.

"When the matter has been thus gone through and digested, I can follow it up, and give it polish, and analyse it by the aid of Pothier, in the proper treatise. In the course of my study, I must make a point of noticing whatever amounts to a principle or general rule of law, either in a decision, or in the reasons of a decision, taking a note of it, as far as possible, in concise and technical terms, with the view of hereafter arranging these notes in order of matter.

"In this way I shall complete a course of com-

parative study of French and Roman law, and I shall have mastered their general principles; it will then be easy to come down to particular points, and to follow them out through all their ramifications.

“Second object—*Literary*. The art of proving and of pleasing my hearers. The art of proving: I must learn the rules of rhetoric, and join practice with theory. The art of pleasing an audience is hardly to be distinguished from the preceding. It may be acquired with pleasure and with certainty by reading the best orators and poets of ancient and modern times. A deep study of the orations of Cicero, better than anything else, will teach the secrets of the art of oratory.

“I have three opportunities of practising: sittings of the court, private discussions, and translation. In these three exercises I shall apply both branches of my studies,—knowledge of law, and skill in oratory.

“As to sittings of the court, a thorough knowledge of the course of business and of procedure is absolutely necessary, and is closely connected with all the rest. I must carefully attend the sittings of the first Chamber of First Instance, and must take notes both in court and after my return home. Hearings before referees may also prove very useful. I must go to them occasionally, and give particular attention to the forms of procedure, and get the papers in some cases, and analyse them with care.

“For private debates, I must join some circle of young men, besides attending at the court, prepare the question thoroughly, draw up a sketch of a speech, and for carrying it out, trust my natural readiness. When I shall have the post of royal advocate, I must at first write out my speech, and correct it over and over again. It would be well

to put one's-self under strict obligation, by accepting the office of secretary to a conference.

"For translation, whenever I meet with any remarkable passage in Latin or any other foreign language, I will make a tolerably free translation of it."

In drawing up his distribution of time, the young magistrate foresaw every circumstance, arranged everything beforehand, and laid out everything with the exactitude which thus early characterised him. We shall not give the details of this long code of laws. It may be enough to notice that he tried early rising and late retiring alternately, that he might have a period of calm and silence dedicated to study. He judged morning labour to be the best, as being at once less fatiguing and more profitable; so he fixed his hour of rising at four, a practice which he continued for the rest of his life. By this promptitude in the morning, he was able to hear Mass every day, and, moreover, to secure some hours of study before going to court.

Thus Gustave de Ravignan made his preparations, without forestalling his opportunity. It came at length; one day, while the advocates were out of court, a civil matter of a very tedious nature was suddenly called on. "Who is charged with the report?" inquired M. Séguier, and at once turning, a little maliciously, to the youngest auditeur, he said, "Well, let us see for once what can be done by this young gentleman, whose acquaintance we have yet to make," and the papers were handed to him. On the appointed day, the Court heard a most lucid and logical report read before them with a command of voice, a clearness of utterance, a precision of articulation, a gravity and dignity of deportment, which showed, from the very commencement, that an orator had appeared. The counsellors all looked on with astonishment; a *man* stood disclosed before them.

Having once stood this test, his road was open before him. A single trial had made his reputation secure; for in this first success, something more than good luck was clearly recognised; superior talent was discernible, and the promise of no ordinary career for the future.

Henceforward opportunities of distinguishing himself flowed in beyond his hopes; it seemed natural that the most important and most difficult reports should be intrusted to him. Soon the talents of the young man became too conspicuous for him to be left in the lower ranks of the magistracy. The demeanour of the orator, at once simple and dignified, lent its aid; his engaging appearance, his kindness of heart, his upright and wise good sense, and the lofty thoughts and sentiments which he uttered, gained him the esteem and affection of all his colleagues. M. Bellart, the Procureur-Général, had no hesitation in entrusting to him a post very seldom conferred on so young a man, of acting as deputy, in the absence of the public advocates, both in civil and criminal matters. He justified this confidence. His noble language, the dignity of his carriage before his audience, his clearness and force in argument, the weight of his assertions, all concurred to make men regard him as a future master of the eloquence which suits the public service. His opening speeches were reckoned models. "It is D'Aguesseau again," they said. Being called on to perform the important duties of Advocate-General at the Court of Assizes, throughout the sittings, and amidst most important business, he was always master of his position. His kindness gained the affection of all, while his uprightness enforced universal respect. This twofold character will hereafter show itself in his apostolic ministry.

In the midst of these labours and successes, Gustave was pursuing, without deviation, his way along another road, of more importance, and in which his advance was not less rapid. At this time he began that secret training of himself which made him what he afterwards became in his apostolic career. Religion, once for all, gained the upper hand in his soul, and its blessed influence developed his excellent natural gifts, and gave a wonderful completion to his honesty of character, his correctness of judgment, his strength of will and goodness of heart.

There was at this time in Paris a pious society of young men, who on certain days met together as brothers. An altar of Mary, the holy Mother of God, and the dear mother of the children of the Church, marked the place of their meeting. They joined in prayer before it, and each went back to his home more of a Christian and more of a man. This humble and harmless meeting became famous, being dragged before the public with a thousand invectives, and calumniously denounced to the authorities. The association must have been doing a great deal of good, to account for so much evil being said of it. The fright that it occasioned gave rise to many a laugh, after the comedy had been played out.

At a time when so many minds were enslaved by human respect, Gustave de Ravignan was a stranger to cowardice. The injustice of the violent, and the acquiescence of the weak, filled him with indignation, and he acquired a taste for unpopularity. He hastened to add to his official title of magistrate the pious title of sodalist. Soon he will adopt another name, the object of yet fiercer insults, by bearing which he will share in the reproaches heaped upon Christ. There was another reason. Like that King of France who was called

the humblest of men, and the proudest of Christians, he mistrusted himself, and felt that his weakness stood in need of protection and of sympathy. Now in the sodality he found a Mother in heaven and brethren in the world.

Thus, then, did Gustave, while seeking greater security of escaping from the contagion of evil, begin himself to exercise an influence for good. He was learning how to work conversions; and from this time forth he was convinced that nothing deserved the name of truth on earth but the service of God, nor to be called happiness but to save one's brethren. Heaven blessed these efforts, and while still but a magistrate, he was already in a true sense an Apostle.

A young orphan, of the name of Clément, whom family misfortunes had compelled to interrupt his studies, found in him more than a tutor. Gustave having met him, conceived for him an affection, the warmth of which was enhanced by compassion; to this youth he dedicated his affection and his time, himself assisting his literary studies, and, at the same time, instilling into him religious sentiments. The poor orphan soon found himself in more urgent need of piety than of learning. Decline of strength, and sickness came upon him, and he was forced to resign himself to death. Gustave stayed with his friend to the last, soothed his distress, consoled him in the hour of death, and with his own hands closed his eyes.

In the course of this sickness he wrote:—"This good youth is, I doubt not, dying; it is fortunate for him. I have told him what I really feel, that I love him too much to wish for his recovery. Our conversation is on death, and on what follows death. Pray that he may come to pray for us. Before God we must not give way to sorrow. . . . Make much of religion, for there is nothing else in the world."

The Comte de X***, one of the *émigré* nobility, a mere child still, though with white hair, notwithstanding the severe lessons which Providence had given him, still clung to the follies of the age of Voltaire. Gustave de Ravignan happened to fall in with him, and was not repulsed by his scoffs, but sought his company, in order to gain him for God. He brought him back first to common sense, then to the faith, and did not leave him until he had seen him make a Christian end. The old man, on awaking from his dream, was never weary of reading a copy of the *Imitation of Christ*, a present from his young friend, and frequently exclaimed, "Oh, how beautiful it is! it is like a new world! Oh, that I had known it sooner!"

In the month of June 1818, Gustave lost her who had been the angel guardian of his childhood, Mme. de Saint-Céran, whom he loved as a mother and honoured as a Saint. He cheered the last hours of this aged woman, who had guided his own first steps in life. Sorrow brings us nearer to God; his piety grew warmer under his affliction. On his knees, by the side of this holy death-bed, he suggested thoughts of faith and feelings of hope, exercising thus early the priestly art, in which he was one day to excel.

The day after this death, another alarm came upon him. His elder sister, who had accompanied her husband, the General Exelmans, in his exile, fell ill, and Gustave, passing from one sick chamber to another, hastened to visit her in Germany, and obtained leave to bring her back to France.

Providence sent him affliction upon affliction, but not without design, and amidst these trials we shall see the divine plan worked out. In 1819, Gustave, against the wish of his physician, determined to abstain throughout Lent. Before Easter he was seized by a nervous fever, which, though unaccom-

panied with danger, was not so with suffering ; and a remarkable feature of the attack was that he could not think except in Latin. He was forced therefore once again to seek from Bayonne the restoration of the health lost at Paris. During this compulsory holiday, towards the end of September, he, for the first time, disclosed to his mother his wishes and his plans. He believed that he had a call from God. Mme. de Ravignan felt no less surprise than sorrow, and employed all the time that remained, until his return to Paris, in persuading him against a vocation in which she wanted either the power or the will to believe. She obtained at least a promise of some delay ; but her son made her understand that he did not give up his design, he merely put off the time of carrying it out, and, should God really be pleased to call him to His service, he would quit all, without notice to any person whatever.

He speaks no less distinctly in a letter to his brother, written in the course of the October following, from the Château de Ravignan :—" I am almost determined to enter the seminary. Some six months ago this idea came very forcibly into my mind ; I have been turning it over, and have not yet taken a final resolution. My mother worries herself and worries me. You know well that when once I have made up my mind, nothing in the world will stop me. I have looked at my plan from every point of view. If God calls me, I shall obey."

Meantime Gustave re-entered on his professional duties with so much apparent zeal, and on social intercourse with so much relish, that his poor mother, hoping that for which she wished, began to flatter herself that he thought no more of any different future. She did not know her son thoroughly ; she was not aware what a depth of fixity of purpose and energetic power there was in him ; she did not understand the power he had of acting with freedom,

at the same time that he kept himself in check, of living in the world with the mien of one resolved to live in it for ever, and the secret intention of abandoning it to-morrow. While he was, above all, a child of duty, he was also, in the best sense, a child of society, and even of gaiety ; on one side he was serious and conscientious, on the other, cheerful and agreeable.

• How serious were his studies and thoughts at this time, is attested by some fragments of a work which he planned on the Ethics of Law. It is plain that he submitted his production at once to the judgment of some severe critic ; for on the margins there may yet be clearly read some notes written in pencil by another hand ; and the upshot was, that the frank young man broke off his work, and summed up his experience by writing this sentence, which has been struck out: *I am not made to be an author.*

His gay times of relaxation offer a contrast to these grave works. The magistrate condescended to turn poet, at least by composing fugitive pieces, and at every family anniversary he brought his tribute of verse. A manuscript book, to which he gave the name *Literaria in sæculo*, contains many attempts at lyric or elegiac poetry. Still, under this trifling form there was always something serious at bottom ; contempt of the world, love of country, zeal for religion, were the only subjects from which his genius drew its inspiration.

“Whatever bears the mark of religion and of friendship,” he wrote to his brother, “can never fail to make the most lively impression on me ; my youthfulness is all confined to myself. But religion has so much strength, and influence, and beauty, that it elevates and encourages at the same time that it satisfies, and does not leave us empty ; for after having come under its influence, we do not

return to ourselves full of vexation and remorse ; we return full of calm."

Meantime Gustave entered heartily into society, and made a very good impression. He might, without self-deceit, anticipate success, for though yet so young, his reputation recommended him, and he joined to an honourable name most brilliant personal qualities. In him interior and exterior were in perfect harmony. It would be impossible to imagine a more perfect type of a young man : the expression of his countenance was excellent, his forehead high and full of dignity, his features fine and characteristic, his eyes deep and blue, by turns animated and affectionate, his figure slight and graceful. To this picture must be added scrupulous attention to person and dress, perfect politeness, and a nameless something, the reflection of a lofty mind, a great intellect, and a pure and affectionate heart. The result of the whole was what is called a distinguished person. When Gustave was setting out for an evening party with his brother, he would sometimes say to him, "Come now, let us show that we are gentlemen." His natural bent was rather for society, but religion afterwards gave him a very different turn. If, in some respects, the world disgusted him, I am inclined to think that in others it was not distasteful. Thus he seemed to like his mother's evening receptions, and when one had passed, he was anxious for her to fix the day for another. And sometimes, on returning from a ball, he was heard to exclaim, "How vexed I am with myself that I enjoyed it." Mournful gaieties which leave nothing but regret or remorse !

However, in the midst of the fascinations of the world and its trifles, the young man's principles never wavered. By constantly practising a prudent reserve, he was able to enforce reserve in others, and to keep all indiscretion at a distance.

His modesty had in it something of severity, and civility never led him to compromise his conscience. One day he was at a great dinner party, and next to him sat a young lady in showy but scanty attire ; he wrapped himself up in his gravity and remained stiff and silent. The unlucky girl ventured a question : " M. de Ravignan, have you no appetite ? " The question at length produced an answer. Gustave did not turn to his neighbour, but bending towards her, he said in a half-whisper : " And you, Miss * * *, have you no shame ? " She asked no more questions, but it was her turn to lose her appetite. Thunder-struck at this single word, after more than twenty years she still heard it in her dreams.

Thanks to his *Order of the Day*, Gustave secured a just proportion among his employments ; work and prayer served to keep his balance steady, and amusement never gained the supremacy.

Human respect, as we have already said, never reached his heart. Once, in his presence, one of the company began an attack on religious orders, and especially on the Jesuits. The young De Ravignan at once took up arms for them, and rising from his seat, exclaimed, " I mean to be a Jesuit myself some day." " Very well," replied his adversary, " you will be turned out like the rest." " Be it so," he replied, " I shall be turned out ; but I shall die a Jesuit." And as he said so he acted.

During the vacation of 1820 he went to the South alone. There he found means to help one of his early friends to die a Christian death. The lively faith and sympathetic charity of this young comforter commanded the admiration of the whole of a weeping family. Though he regretted his friend he congratulated him on his fate ; he already longed for death, and said, " Ah, how I wish I was in his place ! "

At the same time he wrote the following letter,

the last he dated from Saint-Laurent : " While I am resting here the time passes very quickly. I shall have to put on the collar of misery again, and drag it until death. Such is our fate : and death, too, is coming. Solitude instructs and tempers the soul anew. You complain, my dear friend, that you do not use sufficient reflection : it is so with all of us, I fancy, with me more than with others. The details of life, our employment, our affections, our family troubles, how many obstacles are here to profitable thought ! At Saint-Laurent things go rather better. Faith follows us everywhere and fills every vacancy. It is our sheet-anchor against change. I have renewed my prayers at the grave of our honoured father. May God grant that we may one day meet to part no more ! "

On returning to Paris, the young magistrate seemed to redouble his zeal ; it was because he had in view his approaching change of life ; but he observed silence, and no one, his mother least of all, had any suspicion of the thought of his heart. It is true that he was observed to be moody and full of thought for hours and even days together : within the family circle jokes were made about his *fits*, and he was the first to smile at what seemed his melancholy. There was no change in his tender affection for his relatives, nor was the calm of his interior ever disturbed ; he was merely gathering his forces, for he was about to act.

In the summer of 1821, Gustave de Ravignan acted as advocate-general in the well-known case of Cauchois-Lemaire, and was subsequently appointed Deputy Procureur du Roi at Paris. This promotion was sure soon to lead to his being raised to the rank of advocate-general. " Make way for the young man," this time said M. Séguier, the First President ; " my chair is holding out its arms for him." M. Bellart regarded him as destined for

the highest dignities in the magistracy ; the public voice was confident that both in the courts, and doubtless in the legislature too, he would become one of our great orators, one of our ablest lawyers, First President, Keeper of the Seals. Had he done so, what would now remain of him ? By rising to none of these posts, he rose to something higher than all.

The new deputy made little account of an office which he reckoned on leaving so soon ; but seeing that his family were glad of his promotion, he made a show of being himself pleased at it.

He communicated the news to his mother in these terms : " I hasten to announce to you that I am definitely nominated to the office for which we have been wishing. I am glad to be able to give you this satisfaction ; the pleasure I myself feel is chiefly in the thought that you are pleased, and a son's happiness should consist in giving happiness to his mother. Allow me to make an offering to you of all the congratulations or the success which God may send me."

During the winter of 1822 he continued to go into society, but he no longer did more than be present at balls without taking part in them ; it was now with him a mere matter of civility. His thoughts were elsewhere. " Look at men," he said, " they dance, they sing, they cross the frozen stream, they sleep, they eat. Miserable as we are, why have we so much pride ? . . . After all, there is but one thing worth considering, and it is not life, nor wealth, nor knowledge ; it is death and immortality. This thought may withdraw our taste from pleasure and happiness, but it gives us a taste for felicity of another kind, healthier and keener far. If I am a Christian I am happy, and without leaving my closet have studied the whole world. I know what ought to be the object of all

our efforts and all our desires : unhappily I often go astray ; but I am led back—one thought ever occupies me, and I walk in its presence. I have not yet passed the threshold ; they wish me to wait : I will wait and mature.”

Such, too, were the thoughts of St Francis Xavier after hearing from the mouth of St Ignatius those weighty words of the gospel : “What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul ?”

“I have just come back from church,” he wrote again on Easter Day ; “I have just fulfilled the most holy, the most easy, and the most fruitful of our duties ; the future has nothing to make me afraid. My mind is calm in the midst of life, in the midst of destruction. All things pass, but conscience remains. . . .”

“Fortune !” he exclaimed another day ; “with faith and hope we may be happy in the midst of poverty. . . . We shall all cease to live, and all will be over.”

One of his colleagues was going to marry a lady of large fortune. His only compliment was, “How I feel for you ! you are going to come under the curse of wealth.”

“Of what are men thinking ?” he said again, with an expression of surprise and sorrow ; “we ought to mount on the house-tops and cry to them, ‘You are mad ! of what are you thinking ?’”

About the beginning of April he mentioned to his mother that he should soon be absent for a while. Some days afterwards he announced that the time had come. She was disturbed and uneasy, and plied him with questions. He begged her not to press him, leaving her to suppose that he had been selected to conduct some political business which necessitated the journey he was about to take.

On Thursday, April 15, he for the last time consented to accompany his family to an evening party at the house of Mme. de Vatismesnil. He spent almost the whole time sitting by the side of a poor young lady, who was already in ill health, and who died soon after. While watching all the company, he more than once turned to the invalid and said with a smile, "Really you and I are the only sensible people here."

The morrow and the day following he was out of doors a long time; he was making his preparations, but nothing was yet known. At table his mind seemed preoccupied, and he ate little; but this was attributed to his dislike of abstinence food. After the disclosure of his position, it was remembered that his eyes had often been seen full of tears.

On Sunday he dined in town, and told his mother that he would meet her at a house where she was to pass the evening. He did not come. His mother was uneasy, without knowing why. She left the company earlier than usual, and on reaching home learned that he had already retired for the night. She soon went to her room, and remained there some time in great agitation. Gustave had told her that he should positively set out on the next morning for the journey of which he had spoken; that he should be absent for eight days; that during this time he should not write, but that he would send a letter in case he did not return on the eighth day. The poor mother passed an anxious night: I do not know that the son was free from anxiety.



CHAPTER III.

RETIREMENT AT ISSY.

Gustave de Ravignan makes known his entry at the Seminary—Receives the Tonsure—First thoughts of Montrouge—He renounces his property.



LETTER, dated May 5, 1822, lets us into Gustave de Ravignan's secret, and leads us from the bar to the sanctuary.

"MY VERY DEAR MOTHER,—God, as you know, has long since and often inspired me with the desire of dedicating myself entirely to His service; His goodness has not wearied of protecting me.

"The time has come for me to take a decided course. The advice of M. Frayssinous, and other enlightened clergymen, led me to seek in retreat the light I needed. I went to the country-house of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice at Issy. I was received with the most Christian kindness and courtesy. I beg you, dear mother, to pardon my having concealed from you the reason of my absence; I could not do otherwise; I knew too well your tender affection for the most unworthy of your children.

"I will not tell you how strongly, and with how much consolation, I have been impressed, through God's grace, by the consideration of my own life, and of the sublime truths of religion, under the direction of a humble priest, who is filled with the Spirit of God, and possessed of all that the world esteems, and of much that it is not wise enough to esteem. A wise and prudent course was given to my meditations and ardent prayers. Be assured that in the face of a future so serious as the life of a priest all illusions vanish.

"M. Mollevaut, the Sulpician of whom I was speaking, is just such a spiritual man as I needed, no less disinterested than one's own conscience; when M. Frayssinous put me into his hands, he said to me at Paris, 'When he has declared what is your vocation, I shall be as well satisfied as if God himself had spoken.'

"God has spoken, my very dear mother, and I obey with joy. I thank Him for withdrawing me from the world. I thank Him from my heart for bringing me to repentance, and for the life of peace which, as I trust, He will allot me. Bear with your son, dear mother, if He urge you also to render the like obedience. Allow me to believe, and to be better assured of it than you yourself are, that the prayers of a Christian mother have gained me that peculiar protection of God which I experience.

"Though I shall be wholly occupied in my sacred duties and employments, my affection for you will still have a large place in my heart; far removed from the dissipation and the turmoil of the world and of business, close to you in soul, though far distant in body, my thoughts will be of you, and I shall be earnest in my prayers to God for your safety, for your salvation, which is dearer to me than anything in the world.

"I shall be dedicated in a special manner, as re-

ligion directs, to the worship of the most excellent pattern of mothers, and as a dutiful child I shall recommend to her my own beloved mother, and the blessings of heaven will come down on you and on all our family. This is all, dear mamma, that I have to tell you. The decision is taken ; by God's help, nothing shall shake my resolution.

"It remains for me to fulfil a duty which is rendered the easier by your indulgent kindness : it is humbly to beg your pardon for all the annoyance I have given you, for my hastiness, for my pride, for my failures in duty towards you, my good mother. Grant me your pardon and blessing."

It would be impossible to describe the distress of Mme. de Ravignan at first reading this letter, at once so filial and so Christian, but we may well excuse it in a mother. God is ready with pardon for natural emotion. Still, in the midst of her grief, this too-loving mother summoned up energy ; she wrote immediately to Mgr. Frayssinous, the Bishop-elect of Hermopolis, to beg an interview with him. The prelate received her the following day with the greatest kindness, and exerted himself to comfort her with the assurance that her son was not parted from her never to return ; he frequently repeated, " I am growing old ; your son is destined to take my place." The prophecy was, we know, fulfilled.

After the wont of great souls, Gustave believed that he had done nothing, and retained perfect dominion over his heart, although he was full of feeling for the sufferings of others. "Do not suppose," he said to his brother, "that there is any virtue in it, sacrifice, or merit. No ; . . . I sacrifice nothing for God ; He does all for me." "As to sacrifices," he said again to a friend, "my only sacrifice would have been to return to the

world." Yet he sometimes added, "My poor mother is much in my thoughts. . . . If I have shed some tears, it has been only out of affection for my relatives." His prayers to heaven were for them: "I trust that God, and the cherished Patroness of mothers, will keep and support my mother. I am going to give her trouble and sorrow; I, too, feel grief at this, but it weighs as nothing in the balance of eternal justice."

The magistrate who, now turned Seminarist, was desirous of breaking away from the world with one bound, wrote on the same day, May 5, 1822, to his mother, his chiefs, and his colleagues. They all received the news at the same time, when all was over. The character of the future Jesuit is clearly seen in these remarkable letters of farewell, so brief and calm; the writer is clearly that most humble of religious, that most faithful of friends, that most resolute of men: it is already Father de Ravignan.

He wrote thus to a colleague:—"You who have some acquaintance with me, but do not yet know me well, you will have difficulty in understanding this vocation. I am, it is true, far the last of those on whom God might have looked. But His adorable will sports even with our unworthiness; He has torn me from the world; all is over; my resolution is taken. I know too well your friendship for me not to be convinced of the joy you will feel in your conscience when you know that mine is calm, and satisfied with the prospect. I leave you engaged with the political conflict, with all the earnestness that strength of character and virtue produce. Have courage; God will be your support. I, a humble child of the sanctuary, will raise suppliant hands to heaven to obtain you the victory."

Gustave had been writing letters all the day; towards evening he began to feel himself at liberty;

nothing remained but to dispose of some articles connected with his profession. He finished with this final commission : "What do you think ? I am going to enter the Seminary. I the least worthy, the least faithful, the least loving of God's servants have been called by Him to the most awful of functions . . . Yes, and my joy is in my sorrow for the past, my conviction of my duty. Pardon me, once more, I beg it of you especially, my dear colleague, pardon me the pain and offence I gave you, by an enthusiasm which was unseemly in a Christian. I am speaking to an indulgent brother.

"I am very tired with all the letters I have had to write. Say a thousand kind things to our former good colleagues in the Court : ask them all in my name to remember and pray for me.

"You, my dear friend, have got my scarlet gown ; be good enough to accept it as a token of our friendship. I am going to trespass on your good nature. There are at the Court of First Instance two black gowns of mine, one quite new, two waistcoats, a book, a court-hat, a girdle ; ask for them and dispose of them as you think best. Give them as presents to friends or to the servants ; whatever you choose to do will be quite right. If you prefer to sell any part for the benefit of the House of Refuge, do just as you please.

"Adieu, my dear friend ; think of me sometimes, pray for me, and believe me to be throughout life ever yours devotedly."

The scarlet gown bequeathed to M. Jules Goussin, Counsellor of the Royal Court of Paris, has become an heirloom in his family.

The Bishop of Orleans, with that nicety of feeling which is able to say what it pleases by saying everything well, did not hesitate, in a discourse pronounced over his coffin, to tell an anecdote of which the simple and almost trifling character

received elevation from the solemnity of the occasion. "I remember it still; I was young then, only twenty. I had just consecrated myself to the Lord when I witnessed the arrival at the Seminary where I was living, of the young magistrate, so sedate, so gentle, and so passionless. I was much struck, and powerfully drawn towards him and I shall never forget the tone, the inflection, which yet resound in my heart, and will remain there for ever.

"It was Sunday; during our recreations, we witnessed the arrival from Paris of young magistrates, lawyers, advocates already known to fame. They came to demand, to carry away with them one whom they regarded as lost. Suddenly he was seen at the top of a small flight of steps, which I have still before my eyes in the grounds at the rise of the hill in the delightful retreat of Issy; he saluted them from some distance with a heavenly smile, and said, Ah, I have made my escape from you. This familiar language, used so kindly and forcibly, expressed all that could be said."

During the first few days, many letters and many visits flowed in upon his retirement. "There are still some friends who think of me," was the simple remark of the young Seminarist; "there will soon be fewer. We come here seeking to be forgotten, but at the same time hoping to meditate on God."

M. Bellart, the Procureur-Général, replied on May 6, 1822, to the letter which his young deputy had sent him on the previous day. This letter has already been frequently published, but it is too much to the honour of the one and of the other for us not to quote it in our turn. This homage is due from the history of F. de Ravignan to the memory of M. Bellart.

"MY DEAR GOOD RAVIGNAN,—Were I not like

you, completely disenchanted with all the illusions of the world, your letter would grieve me deeply ; for the sake of the public and for my own sake I should regret a good and amiable young man, who promised to be an ornament to the magistracy, and to render distinguished services to his country ; I should regret that you by your own act cut short a career which seemed destined to be brilliant, and to afford just gratification to your honourable ambition, at the same time that it offered you great opportunities of being useful to religion, to society, and to the king, by the open profession of sound views, and by the enlightened administration of justice. Although then my personal feelings would lead me strongly to praise you, and the disgust which I often feel at the sight of the madness and perversity with which I am surrounded would do the same, I still think that I ought to rise above this sort of selfishness, which makes me rather envy your course than disapprove of it, and to invite you, my dear Ravignan, to reconsider the matter. You are taking a serious step, one which will impose upon you most difficult duties, much privation beyond the power of man to endure, to all which you must make up your mind to bow your neck to-day, to-morrow, for years, for ever, your whole life through, without murmurs, and above all without regrets. I can understand courage—great courage—kept up for a certain time ; but there is something terrible in an engagement to renounce all to which nature most strongly calls us. In a moment of fervour, of enthusiasm, our imagination sometimes represents to us as permanently possible, something which we are enabled to do only by virtue of a present grace, and of a strong determination which has not yet had time to evaporate. But what if the grace leave you, if the determination prove no longer

strong enough for the struggle—if it turn out after prolonged endurance, that no good has been done by the lengthened sacrifice of all the affections which are intended to be ornaments of the career of a good man who lives a Christian life, and of all the inclinations created and placed in us by God, who has given them to man on the sole condition of yielding to them no more than His holy laws allow! What if after this long endurance the result is nothing but a fall, with risk of the salvation of the soul! Consider, my dear Ravignan, how disastrous would be such an end, and reflect well while yet it is in your power.

“Without hesitation I adore God’s designs in your regard, if the marks of them are clearly discerned by men of enlightenment and virtue, on whose judgment I would rely more than on my own.

“As to yourself, if you are quite sure of persevering, I deem you happy to escape from this noisy theatre. Living here, I feel a weariness even unto death, too often, not to set its full value on that calm peace of the soul which those must enjoy who have been so favoured by God as to pass their lives far removed from this headlong game of passions, crimes, and follies, which never, I believe, were seen with less disguise upon the stage of the world. But is there not, at the same time, some degree of selfishness in a resolution such as yours? You will have gained for yourself a share in the advantages of social life by seizing a happy position where you will escape all the dangers of the world. But will you have gained anything for others? Are you quite sure that you have not sacrificed any duty to your taste? God has given you talents; does He allow you to hide the light under the bushel? There is more than one way, my dear friend, of making a sacrifice of one’s life. A good

husband, a good father, an upright magistrate, an earnest Christian, who does not blush to profess his faith in the midst of the corruption of the world, gives as much edification, and pays his debt to God and men as well as a holy priest.

"I honour, without doubt, from the bottom of my heart those heroes of religion who devote themselves to the life of perfection and unceasing sacrifice, in which, if they are guided purely by thoughts of heaven and of charity, so much good may be done to themselves and to others. But to be a true hero, we must have the grace of the Almighty; for if one fall, if one sink to be a man, he sinks to something less than man.

"My true and tender affection for you, my dear Ravignan, has put these thoughts into my mind. Reflect upon them. It may well be that I was not myself found worthy for so high an enterprise, and that my imagination is unduly disquieted at the sight of what is proposed by you, who are capable of more. But the fatherly affection I feel for you called on me to act thus freely. I do not oppose your design, I only charge you to mature it well. You are, as yet, no way bound. If ever you are, I shall do nothing but encourage you, and hope that in your new state of life you may do as much good as in that which you are leaving."

M. de Peyronnet confessed that he, too, did all in his power to dispute this prize with God; and when Lacretelle saw this contempt of wealth and glory, he exclaimed, "It is clear that *he* is not looking after Church preferment."

Amidst all these expressions of opinion, the high-minded fugitive was not insensible, but unshaken. "The proofs of regard which I have received from my chiefs and my friends have affected me much," he wrote on May 13. "In this happy retirement, far from all trouble, I have no need of consolation;

nor is there need of anything to prevent my feeling a sacrifice which I am not conscious of making. But I did feel some regret at separating myself from honoured teachers and friends, and it gives me a calm pleasure to be remembered by them. I am particularly affected by the letter of M. Bellart, who speaks to me like a true father. I am glad to speak to him as a son, and say that he mistakes my position. My vocation began three years and more ago. God enabled me to mature and try it. In accordance with His will, I made my decision; and I am calm in adhering to it. Pray Heaven to grant me, wretched sinner that I am, all the graces of which I have need.

“My best respects to the Procureur-Général, and a thousand kind things to all our colleagues.

“Believe me to be ever your sincere and faithful friend and old colleague.”

Some days after, Mme. de Ravignan, her first burst of grief having a little subsided, came with her family to visit the young solitary. This interview was the occasion of many fresh tears; but as commonly happens when God demands a sacrifice, consolations soon came where at first there was nothing but bitterness. The visits to Issy became really pleasant. One day the Seminarist contrived an agreeable surprise for his friends. He made an appointment for them to come while the community were walking out, and he got permission beforehand to take them into his dear retreat. He was glad to show them his own little room, and the extensive gardens, and the quiet sanctuary of our Lady of Loretto. The son seemed happy, and the mother was comforted. On June 9, Gustave sent a note with some good news. “I shall receive the tonsure in this house the day after to-morrow, the 11th, at the hands of Mgr. Frayssinous, directly after his consecration. Pray much for

me." Accordingly on the day named, in the presence of the whole community, and of some visitors of rank, the new Bishop of Hermopolis gave the clerical tonsure to this his spiritual child, who was destined after some years to succeed him in his apostolic functions. "My dear friend," said the holy Bishop, "you are no longer your own, you belong to God. You have consecrated to Him all that you have, and all that you are. The world will talk of your sacrifices; the world understands nothing of the things of God. You have given up nothing, or rather you have given up turmoil for peace, illusions for truth, the world for God. Goodly in truth is your heritage. I am leaving you to return to the midst of the world. Pray for me, and enjoy the blessings which Providence has granted you."

"On the conclusion of the ceremony," as we learn from the Bishop of Orleans, "these two great men joined us in our walk under the trees which sheltered our home. We gathered close round them. . . . We drank in with eager hearts all the gracious words which fell from their lips. Suddenly the pious Bishop, indicating the young Abbé de Ravignan, who had separated himself from us for a moment, and was walking a little distance off, spoke in a voice full of emotion, and with eyes raised to heaven and full of tears, 'Ah, my friends,' said he, 'if there be any Providence, the Kingdom of Heaven is his right.'"

On June 16, the young cleric gave the following account of the events of the 11th: "Here I am, at last, my dear colleague, *de foro ecclesiæ*. I cannot tell you the effect which the ceremony of receiving the tonsure had on me. I was so happy as to receive it at the hands of the excellent Bishop of Hermopolis; he spoke a few words to me which caused me to burst into tears. I pray

much for you, and love you in our Lord with all my heart."

The young Issy student was not a man to waste time in making up his mind. As early as May 8 he drew up for himself a scheme of work in accordance with his vocation. Among his papers we find a book of Ecclesiastical Studies bearing this date. It consists of notes on Church History, and fragments of some length on the lives of the Saints. On these sheets we read the initials of the words *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*; these words are an augury of the future; the seminary student was already in heart a novice of the Society of Jesus. We shall content ourselves with citing a few lines which form the conclusion of an essay on the life of St Paul, the first hermit; these first-fruits of his genius will serve to show us the foundation on which F. de Ravignan was built. His words are already as weighty and measured as his thoughts.

"We can in some small degree understand the men who had the happiness to be chosen by God for the service of retiring into the depths of the desert, there to adore Him, and by unceasing contemplation to make reparation for the insults His glory receives from the base forgetfulness of men. But this disgust with the world, so profitable to those who know how to use it, finds but few souls faithful to its counsels. We must not, it is clear, yield to a sort of natural weariness, which at times comes over even the passions, so as to look for a soft and lazy peace, or some chimera of happiness which we are never to find on earth; this would be a strange mistake. But to detest the errors and the excesses of men; deeply to deplore one's own misery and weakness; to burst the chains of a painful servitude; to withdraw from all that is nothing but empty noise and disastrous illusion; to embrace resolutely, whatever our circumstances, an

interior and truly profitable life ; never to fear nor shun toil and useful labour ; to banish ambition from the soul, and to rid one's-self of the silly troubles of the world :—in this conduct consists that spirit of retreat, and of holy detachment, which may well be awakened in our souls by the noble life of a St Paul the Hermit, and of the countless solitaries, his imitators. Happy are we if we can put the true value on their toilsome course ! yet more happy if we succeed in drinking in at their feet a sovereign contempt for all that passes away, in order to devote all our affections to those souls, which, once secured, will never escape our grasp.”

Ecclesiastical science was not exactly what the Abbé de Ravignan had come to look for in the retirement of Issy ; he wished, above all, to acquire the virtues which make up the priestly character. He began therefore a struggle against himself, and especially against that sternness to which the yet undisciplined strength of his character led him. The Abbé Moreau, the venerable founder of the Congregation of the Holy Cross at Mars, has recorded his testimony that De Ravignan's amiability increased in proportion as he advanced in renouncement of self, and that, despite the severity of his words and appearance, simplicity and peace of soul showed themselves in him more and more. The same authority tells us of a little incident where his old magisterial gravity failed him :—“ I remember that he regarded us as rather childish, and even a little silly, especially when we happened to laugh at some names of Saints we heard in the Refectory. I was glad to say to him, on his first arrival, ‘ When you have made your general confession, and you read the Martyrology at the end of dinner, we shall see whether you are able to keep your countenance.’ Accordingly, when it came to our good brother's turn to read, he fell

into a fit of laughing, which led him to remark at the next recreation, 'It is really a disease with which I was not acquainted before; but it is a disease peculiar to the friends of God.'

I have found a letter in which the young solitary replies to some expressions of anxiety of Mme. de Ravignan on the score of his health. The considerations he adduces to reassure her, show how much mastery the spirit of faith exercised over all his thoughts:—"If my health is not good," he said, "I much prefer this state to a vigour which would be troublesome to manage. All the men whom the Church proposes to us as models have been invalids, and I am not an invalid yet; I take good care of myself, it is the wish of those about me, and my wish too. Be quite easy then, my dear mother; do not lament over me; this would grieve me, and you would deceive yourself." We have here a presage of that religious who found rest in sickness and rejoiced in suffering.

For this young child of the sanctuary, Issy was but the vestibule of the Noviciate; the Seminary, a passage from the world to religion. The Abbé de Ravignan aimed at complete self-renouncement; he had withdrawn from the world, and consecrated himself to God, and his heart still cried with St Francis Xavier, "*Amplius, amplius*, More, O Lord, yet more!" What remained was to die to the world and to be sacrificed to God. His natural character urged him no less than grace drew him on: he was born to be a Jesuit.

It was no secret that the Seminarist felt drawn towards the Society. Every Wednesday he asked leave to go to Montrouge; his steps took the same direction as his wishes. But an anecdote related by the Abbé Moreau is still more significant:—"As M. de Ravignan had received no Orders, it was necessary, according to the practice of the

house, that he should have a priest for companion whenever he went out a walk during the vacations. I was honoured with his choice, and every day we went to pass the evening in the Bois de Meudon. There we sat down on a fallen tree, and for nearly an hour together our good brother would read to me the life of St Francis Xavier. Once, I remember well, he broke off his reading and got up, saying, Will you go? will you go? Then he pointed out to me with his left hand the Noviciate at Montrouge, and, by his attitude and animated looks, more than by words, he asked whether I would accompany him in the journey he was before long to take."

It was noticed also that the Abbé de Ravignan had dismissed the servant whose duty it was to attend to his room, and that he himself performed the most menial offices. Thus did the young cleric make trial by anticipation of the holy practices of religious humility. He chose for his guide the venerable M. Mollevaut, that true Sulpician who had gained the name of the Holy Priest, a man eminent no less for learning than for humility. De Ravignan had already consulted him on his vocation, and received from his lips the last counsels which led him to the Noviciate. We learn his decision from a letter which he wrote on October 27, 1822, only five days before he entered Montrouge, to F. Ronsin, director of the Congregation of the Blessed Virgin, to which he had belonged:—"M. Mollevaut thought it right that I should spend some days in reflection and prayer. . . . We have had a final interview; his conclusions are the following, and they are also mine:—

"First. I am called to be a Jesuit; there is no doubt nor misgiving about it; it is my vocation, with all the certainty that we can have in matters of this nature.

“Secondly. The will of God will be accomplished in me, whatever obstacles intervene; and, happen what may, I have ground to hope that, by God’s grace, I shall sanctify myself in the Society of Jesus. Still I must banish every illusion and every human motive from my heart, and make up my mind for interior trouble, struggles, and temptations; for such is the probable, and, in some sense, necessary course of Providence.

“I will not speak to you to-day of the feelings of my heart, of my vocation, for which I bless Heaven a thousand times, of my involuntary and secret impatience, that over great eagerness to succeed, which I now give up. I will only ask your blessing.”

The young man had to encounter some inclinations of nature which strove to forestall the influence of grace. But he triumphed; grace alone remained, and M. Mollevaut had good reason for his decision. The future showed that the conclusion at which the man of God arrived, was as an oracle from God Himself. The worthy son of M. Olier was glad to give a worthy son to St Ignatius. His whole life through, F. de Ravignan honoured with deep and tender feeling the priest who had brought him forth in the Society of Jesus; regarding himself as his son, he extended his gratitude to the whole Congregation of Saint-Sulpice, which had been his cradle.

Thus the question as to his destiny was finally resolved, and it was not the character of the future Jesuit to withdraw from a resolution once adopted. He hastened, on October 31, 1822, to inform the Bishop of Hermopolis of his generous resolve. This letter was found in his own handwriting at the sack of the Tuileries in 1830, contained in a volume of the Conferences of Mgr. Frayssinous, handsomely bound, and bearing the arms of the Dauphin. After the death of F. de Ravignan, this

precious document was met with in the possession of a poor woman living in the suburbs. I quote it with some abridgments :—

“ISSY, 31st October 1822.

“MONSEIGNEUR,—I have again come to a decision, and this time finally ; I shall reach Mont-rouge in the course of the day, on Saturday the 2d. M. Mollevaut put off the decision till after my retreat ; now the retreat is finished, and we think only of the execution. We have concerted the means of meeting exterior difficulties. Blessed and praised be God a thousand times ! I have learned His will, and I obey with joy and confidence.

“I am at last performing the duty which is incumbent on me, of making over all I possess to my brother. The irrevocable instrument will be drawn up to-morrow. . . . I shall soon, thanks to God, be thoroughly poor and contented.

“Receive the expression of my lasting gratitude to you for your kindness towards me ; you know all that I feel, and for whom I pray ; allow me to believe that you pray for me.”

M. le Baron de Ravignan arrived about the same time at Paris, having been summoned from Bordeaux by his brother on an urgent and secret business. The brother made known his resolution, and declared that he would make the baron his heir. Then arose between the two brothers a struggle seldom seen in this world. He that bestowed the gift was more in earnest than he that received it, and hastened at once to the office of Maître Chapelier, a notary of high standing in Paris, and begged him to draw up on the spot an act of renunciation in favour of his brother. Maître Chapelier was acquainted with the young magistrate ; he was astonished at this strange conduct,

sought to make representations, and to bring this first impulse before the tribunal of reflection ; but the Abbé de Ravignan insisted, and cut short every reply with the tone of a man who knows very well what he is about. The act was accordingly drawn up and executed. The worthy notary, full of emotion at a scene so strange to him, accompanied the generous deserter of the world as far as the door of his office. There they fell in with a beggar. The poverty of De Ravignan was voluntary ; he felt in his pocket, and drawing out the last piece of money, he gave it, and, as though he had shaken off some dust, he joyfully raised his hands and exclaimed, " Now, at last, I have nothing left in the world."





CHAPTER IV.

NOVICIATE AT MONTROUGE.

Arrival of the Abbé de Ravignan at Montrouge—Entry on Religious Life—His first Sermons, his Vows.



ON the following day, November 2, 1822, a carriage conveyed two young men along the road from Paris to Issy. A brother was departing for another world, and his brother accompanied him on the way. At the barrier half way, the younger ordered the coachman to stop, embraced his weeping companion, and leaped out, saying, "Here is the end. Good-bye, brother ; now I am wholly free." Saying this he set off at a rapid pace, to pay a last visit to the retreat of Issy. Some final arrangements needed his presence.

When all was ready, M. Mollevaut opened the gate of the grounds, and the Abbé de Ravignan set off alone in the direction of Vanvres. The other students did not know that all was over ; the holy director took on himself to acquaint them with it. "My brothers," he said to them after the lapse of some hours, "I must bid you farewell in the name of M. de Ravignan. He thirsted for

obedience. He has gone to slake his thirst among the Jesuits."

In order to prevent useless and painful opposition, the candidate for religious life had not informed his mother. She became aware of the blow only after it had been dealt, and in the first impulse of her sorrow she wrote to the Bishop of Bayonne, begging him not to grant the letters which would be asked of him. But it was too late. The son had foreseen and guarded against the efforts of his mother. Mgr. d'Astros, who was then Bishop of Bayonne, had answered the application of the Novice on November 9, 1822:—"I congratulate you on being called by God to a state so holy as that of religion, and that too in a Society where the virtues and counsels of the Gospel are so well reduced to practice. I have no intention of offering opposition. Pray for me, and believe in my sincere attachment."

The world talks of everything, and it talked of some secret misunderstanding as having been the origin or occasion of this sudden vocation, as though there were need of deception to cover one's flight from vanity. Men would wish to find romance everywhere; but they will not find it in the history of F. de Ravignan, unless indeed they put it there. He has himself published the secret of his vocation by writing the following lines:—

"I had some prejudices against the Society of Jesus. Pascal, and the traditions of the Parliaments, deceived me and many others; and I must confess that the truth about the Jesuits came upon me in some sort against my will. I have no wish to occupy the public with my private history. I have no need to recount in this place by what path it pleased divine Providence to lead me forward, nor what interior struggle I went through in my conscience, a struggle known to God alone,

but the memory of which will never be effaced from my soul, and which, while it brought me light, caused so complete a change in the whole course of my life. But what it may perhaps be right to say is that my conscience was formed, and my decision taken, in a position perfectly free from every sort of influence, nor indeed has it ever been my nature to submit to influence.

“I may make another assertion: I was led to the determination to become a Jesuit by the very points which are most misunderstood, most distorted, and most attacked in the Institute of the Society.”

In a confidential letter which the Novice wrote to his friend, M. Jules Gossin, he again lets us see the reasons of the step he took;—

“The turmoil, the madness of the world, drove me away; this is true, but much more influential was an indescribable leaning towards religious life which I found in my soul. Pray much to Heaven to grant to me, a wretched sinner, all the graces of which I have need.”

The 2d of November was marked as a perpetual festival in the calendar of his grateful piety. On the last anniversary of the day, in 1857, he still wrote:—“This day five and thirty years ago, God called me into the wilderness, and gave me the grace of quitting the world. Help me to bless Him.”

The good brother who opened to him the door of the Noviciate, still remembers hearing him use these humble words on presenting himself to the Superior:—“I am a poor man come to ask your hospitality. I have nothing but myself to offer; be good enough to receive me for charity.” However the new comer was able to exclaim with the prophet, “This is the place of my rest.” His dreams were at length realised; he would drink

his fill of the waters he desired. Gustave became Xavier.

No one knows, if he have not tasted, the quiet happiness of the first years in religion. However, the Society does not spoil its Novices; while cherishing them it submits them to trial; with gentle firmness it prepares them for the greatest enterprises by the smallest observances, and trains them by ceaseless self-denial for the apostolate, and if need be for martyrdom. But this very education of the soul, toilsome as it is, proves to a generous heart as crowded with delights as it is full of sacrifices.

F. de Ravignan expressed this twenty years later, when he thus laid open his soul:—"I deserve forgiveness if I find my dearest memories when I speak of this time now so distant for me; then the happiest days of my life were passed! Cherished cradle of my childhood in religion, crucible of toil for my soul, fertile time when my mind and heart were purified, never will I forget thee!"

The cause was this: at the opening of his course the young soldier had made his own the famous maxim, written by the hand of St Ignatius on the first page of his "Exercises;" he resolved once for all to conquer himself, and to order his life without respect to the disorderly affections of nature. Thus he merited the recompense which St Ignatius again promises to those who devote themselves to God with a *great and liberal* heart. They alone find no less happiness than profit, and as the struggle goes on, meet with peace in the midst of sacrifice.

Just at this time numberless tales were in currency round about Montrouge. Alarms and threats by thousands encircled the peaceful abode. Calumny was making profit of credulity, and was raising rumours in the hope to alarm. It was one act in

the fifteen years' comedy ; but all the rumours and all the alarms died away on the threshold of the Noviciate. Within this happy enclosure, shut on the side of the world, and open only on the side of heaven, the peace of God reigned amid the silence of prayer. Father Gury presided over this young family with the title of Père-Maître—Father-Master—which so well expressed his duties ; he was, above all others, a man of ancient simplicity, upright and full of the fear of God. Around him, in a poor and straitened dwelling, young men were gathered, who had returned to childhood in the school of evangelical perfection, with no other standard but the Cross, no other weapon but a discipline, no other ambition and no other policy but zeal for God's glory and humility. Assuredly the Noviciate was not more formidable than the Apostles' home on Sion.

The contrast suited in an extraordinary degree the tendencies, and even the natural disposition, of the new Xavier. Since the time when he received the powerful call from God, nothing so attracted his heart as silence in the midst of tumult ; he had need of peace and of war ; peace with God for his soul ; for his mind, war with the world and himself. Hence he made haste to go down into the mystic tomb where, as St Paul expresses it, one must put off the old man to put on the new. He disappeared as though he were dead ; and for ten years the world saw him no more, heard not his name, spoke not of him.

Changes of profession had already more than once brought to Xavier de Ravignan changes of appellation ; in a short time he had worn and discarded many names ; he bore them with honour ; he laid them aside with yet more honour. Lieutenant, magistrate, Seminarist, he was now become a novice, and was henceforth called Brother de

Ravignan ; for such is the humble and affectionate name given by every religious order to such of its sons as are not yet priests. We must employ our own language, and for a time we shall speak of Br. de Ravignan.

The arrival of a new brother was a great event and festival in this little world, so calm and happy ; there was a great sensation when the young magistrate came, whose reputation had gone before him. While yet a recruit of scarce one day's standing, he had already the bearing of a trained soldier. The circumstances of his former life had left no trace on him beyond the greater contempt which he certainly felt for a world which he knew better than the rest. He seemed to have previously undergone a moulding to religious life, and to be identified with it. It might have been thought he was determined to attain perfection in a few months, so readily did he lend himself to whatever it demanded ; but, to tell the truth, here as everywhere, there was a beginning, a middle, and an end. We can only say that Br. de Ravignan began truly after the manner of the Saints—that is, he fell at first into the error of pious excess, and more than once he overleaped the mark to make more sure of the prize. He looked at his vocation with true manly feeling, and deemed that he could never do enough for God.

Those who then knew the generous novice depict him as little different from what we later saw him. The expression of his countenance was decided, but sterner than afterwards. Determination was the character most clearly marked, and was as yet in excess, rendering him very harsh to himself and severe with others. Time and grace ripened the early crudeness of this too masculine disposition ; moderation will succeed excess ; and, in the family of the virtues, determination will bring forth, first

humility, then charity, and finally gentleness : his influence will sway men the more, the less he seem to command. Determination at first characterised his piety ; he seldom experienced consolation in prayer, for God thus early treated him as a soldier hardened to war. By the toilsomeness of his prayer, God strengthened him for the struggle of life, and detached him from even spiritual delights, thus to raise him to that sincere and pure devotedness, the peace of which passes all understanding. The soldier, undismayed, struggled onward by rough paths straight forward, gaining strength from difficulties, courage from humiliation, and wrestling in God's cause against God Himself. At the first signal he was at his post ; and if his hour of prayer had passed wearily in dryness, and the end of the painful exercise had come, he never failed to follow the teaching of his Holy Father at Manresa, and the example of his God in the Garden of Olives, and to prolong the trial beyond the time, that so he might conquer by patience. Success crowned the struggle ; he gained by his perseverance an eminent gift of prayer : this holy labour of the soul became the repose of his spirit and a necessity of his life. United to God by faith, it was here that he sought repose, here prepared for toil ; and if his oratory were at first a Calvary, it became for him afterwards a Paradise.

Determination in piety led naturally to energy in the performance of duty. Never, perhaps, was this great idea of duty carried higher than by F. de Ravignan ; from his very noviciate he found herein his joy and his repose ; it was to him a religion. To duty he had dedicated his whole being ; to it he would readily have sacrificed his life. This deeply Christian feeling gave life to all his actions, and marked all his conduct with the impress of consistent and conscientious generosity. So powerful

was the impulse received in the noviceship, that he never slackened in his course towards perfection ; from first to last exactitude and diligence seemed a part of his nature. He forgot nothing ; still less did he neglect or put off anything. Weakness of body may allow the attention to go astray, but, beyond all doubt, the carelessness which does things by halves, or after the appointed hour, betrays moral weakness. Thus he detested the omissions of caprice, and the delays dear to sloth. I never remember to have noticed him put off to the morrow what he was able, and especially what he was bound, to do that very day. If difficulties hedged round the business, if the duty were full of sacrifice, this was a further reason to hasten him to perform it ; he went forward, making his way over difficulties and repugnances, and, his duty being accomplished, he took his rest in peace of conscience and under the blessing of God.

But in the conduct of his interior, above all, the energy displayed by the novice surpassed belief. He seemed to face round and bring all his powers to bear against himself. The religious life is fundamentally a life thoroughly warlike ; there is open war between grace and nature, the spirit and the flesh ; in this warfare there is no truce nor rest, and the soldier lays aside the sword only to receive the crown. Br. de Ravignan knew well that a bold beginning ensures an easier struggle, a more complete victory. Regarding himself then as his own enemy, he mustered all his energy for the work, despising, hating, persecuting himself ; or rather, to speak with the Gospel, he esteemed, he loved, he truly served his own soul, by fighting on behalf of its freedom and greatness, against the sensuality and vanity which held it in slavery ; and after he had gained the victory, and become master of himself, like another Samson he gathered the honey-

comb from the throat of the lion he had overthrown.

Determination in love also characterised the future Apostle from his very noviceship. There were in his heart depths of a noble affection; it was easy for the most loving of sons, the most devoted of friends, to show himself the most faithful and grateful of religious. After our Lord, our Lady, and the Church, he loved nothing so much as the Society of Jesus. Let us listen to his own words; he will best express his own thoughts. He wrote to his mother:—

“What gratitude should I not owe to our Lord, were it only for having made known to me that good, which, above all, ought to occupy my mind and heart. I have consecrated them wholly to the God who gave them to me; be so good as not to seek to regain them for the world. My business here is to repair the evil which I did in the world, and to make my prayers for you a little less unworthy. This is much better than for us to be united in body, which in truth is a very trifling matter. Believe me, my heart is here more than ever bent upon fulfilling all my duties to my family.

“To live a religious life, and to follow one’s vocation, is really nothing short of living with a more thorough faith, a more exact knowledge of the truth, and a more perfect union with God. All lawful affections grow stronger, and are purified, and afford a heartfelt subject for prayer. A taste for the things of heaven grows more and more; and nothing of the earth is removed from us but the opportunities it offers for sin, for paining persons whom we love and honour, and for self-annoyance. The greatness of this peace may be imagined; and while labouring to make one’s-self holy, no little toil, all is at hand that can and ought to confer happiness. I wish I could make you better under-

stand how happy I am, for your affection would receive comfort, and would enjoy a share of my felicity. Soon your good-will for your son will extend to the Society of which he hopes to be a member. Sorrow is a frequent occupant of a mother's heart; the heart of a mother kind and good as you, the heart of a Christian mother such as you, knows where to look for consolation. Hippolyte is a soldier, I a religious; in these careers do your two sons obey the will of God, and follow His call. We shall all one day forget family troubles, partings, losses; it will be in our common country; if the road thither is sometimes wearisome, it is not very long."

It was not long before Br. de Ravignan was invested, not with a dignity, thank God, for there are none great or small in the Society, but with a post, although a trifling one. In quality of *Brother Porter*, his duty was to preserve the traditions of the rules and customs, to carry the orders of the Master of Novices, to assign to each his tasks, and to attend to countless details. He gave a foretaste of the industry with which he would one day dispose of business, the authority with which he would sway the minds of men. It was enough to hear him say to one, *Go, and he went*; to another, *Do this, and he did it*. We must, however, add that his vigour of mind made itself too much felt. It is true that the *Brother Porter* had less consideration for himself than for others, and himself did much more than he required from others. He was always seen first where trouble awaited him; he was the most ready in obedience; the most zealous and persevering in labour and prayer; the most determined, on recreation days, in those walks then usual at the Noviciate of Montrouge, which were really forced marches, no matter what the season or temperature, what was the state of the weather

or of the roads; he surpassed all in his ambition for humiliation and suffering. But he went too far in measuring others by his own standard, and in leading them by the path he himself trod. There was, doubtless, some excess in his zeal; but, I repeat, such a commencement was unusual, and gave presage of a high destiny.

There was at the bottom of the garden a cold, damp, and desolate path called F. Claver's walk. Br. de Ravignan selected it for himself; he was fond of walking there alone, looking much more serious than under the colonnade at Bayonne. Here he would walk rapidly up and down, his arms folded, his head bent down, his carriage full of recollection, his pale and mortified countenance glowing with heavenly joy. Traits belonging to the recluse and to the soldier were found united in this young man.

The portrait we have just drawn will serve to represent Br. de Ravignan, such as he appeared during his noviciate, and during the ten years that his preparation for the apostolate occupied. It was not until the time came to leave his retirement and enter the lists that he recognised the necessity of relaxing, of becoming a man, in order to deal with men, and of making himself *all to all, that he might gain the whole world to Jesus Christ.*

The retired magistrate, the future preacher, made in the Noviciate, agreeably to custom, his first essays in sacred eloquence. Censures were not spared on his first appearance; but Br. de Ravignan received criticisms, or rather sought after them, just in the way that so many people glean together compliments. Confidence found place in his character; pride would have found place there, had not God and he united to reduce all to order; but there was no room for vanity. His heart was too great for so petty a passion. The novice at this time adopted

a practice which he always observed ; he made a collection of the criticisms passed on his productions, and on the front sheet of his first attempts in the Noviciate, as on the latest Conferences of Notre-Dame, he wrote with his own hand all the unfavourable, and not the favourable remarks which were made upon them. We shall have occasion hereafter to notice this collection again.

One only criticism seemed to move the young preacher, who aimed at speaking well with no object but to do good. He was told that he had not got a missionary style, that he could not make himself intelligible to the people. In former days he had said, Let us show that we are gentlemen ; now he would say, Let us be simple ; in my hearers I see nothing but so many souls ; in the priest they should hear no voice but that of God. He begged of his superiors the favour of being often selected for the *tones*, a kind of exercise in extemporaneous speaking and elocution ; and subsequently he would exhibit ingenuity well becoming a beginner who was anxious to make progress, and he would go round from one to another of his brothers, begging them to add some private remarks to the observations they had made in public. "Well, dear brother, what do you think ? have I improved ? am I more popular ?"

On occasion of one of these private discourses, it happened that he suddenly lost his memory. The young orator seemed to relish the mischance ; impassive and calm he stood for some time silent and motionless ; he then without embarrassment took his notes from his pocket, and went on as if nothing had happened. His countenance did not betray the smallest trace of feeling.

We shall be content with here giving a fragment of a sermon on humility, dated Montrouge, 1823, in which Br. de Ravignan speaks his own mind,

and lays bare his soul, tracing out beforehand the rule which he was to follow his whole life through, in time of trial and of success. He undertook to prove the need of humility to a religious of the Society ; and his second point was to show how this need was increased by the actual state of the world.

After exclaiming, In our days, what is the world ? and begging the pardon of his hearers for conducting them into a country to which they were strangers, he pointed out that they might consider the world as divided into two classes—their avowed enemies, and their devoted friends. We have a double need of humility, he added, to abide the persecutions of the one class, and to receive without complacency the favour of the other. Let us listen for a moment to the novice preacher.

“The most powerful efforts of Hell are now directed against the Society of Jesus. We have thus the opportunity of resembling our Master more closely. His whole life passed amid humiliations and suffering. He bore all with God-like patience and joy. Similar trials ought to find in our hearts similar dispositions. Penetrated with the sense of our shortcomings, convinced of the greatness of the chastisements they have deserved, animated by a holy hatred of ourselves, and a sincere contempt for our rebellious nature, we will adore the hand that smites us, and bow our neck without complaint under the yoke which God pleases to put upon us ; we will confess how infinite is the mercy which still spares us ; we will weep, not for ourselves, but for those who are going astray ; we will bless the instruments of God’s designs, be they who they may ; and we will rejoice to find that they deal with us as we judge that we deserve. This will be humility. . . .

“To be esteemed by others, and never to give

up the thought of our own nothingness and sin ; to see fruits grow beneath our feet, and to remain convinced that we are nothing ; to practise high virtues, and to preserve a deep sense of our vileness ; to deal perfect justice to God and to man alike ; to ascribe to God all the glory, the good, and the success ; to have nothing for the man but contempt, hatred, or indifference ; such is our duty in the day of prosperity ; such is humility.

“ Let us then, my brothers, have equal courage in good fortune and in bad. Under the standard of St Ignatius, to be bold is a duty ; but the promise of victory is given to humility, that marvellous strength of weakness.”

It must be allowed that already the sentiments of the novice orator were the sentiments of a Saint.

We must not look for extraordinary events during this happy period of religious childhood, where one day resembled another. In default of striking incidents, we will quote a few characteristic sayings.

The determined character of the young religious could not endure the least appearance of trifling with vocation. Once he happened to hear a novice complaining somewhat loudly of a hardship he had suffered ; he forthwith took up the matter seriously, and in a tone at once familiar and forcible, said, “ Ah, how is this ? I trust you are not thinking of leaving us ? ” “ Oh, no ! ” was the confused answer of the author of the thoughtless outbreak.

He had continually by him the “ Book of Instructions,” which contains the peculiar rule of the Noviciate, and he as continually employed a phrase which recalled the magistrate : *In the terms of the Instructions.*

He made no distinction among the different

requirements of the rule, all being in fact commands of God. Recreation, he would say, is no less an exercise than meditation ; at its own time the one should be to us as sacred as the other.

He showed an equal respect for the limits placed by obedience to the excessive generosity of his desires ; not to depart from common life, he mortified his mortification itself, and gained the double merit of wishing to do more and of not doing it. Our superiors, he would say, have grace and experience, and they desire our greatest advantage : we must yield to them.

He never spoke of himself ; and if questions were put to him concerning his former life, he either avoided noticing the question, or turned the conversation to another channel. There is nothing, he remarked, better for the soul than those two words in the Imitation : *Ama nesciri*, Love to be unknown.

He noticed occasionally in the youngest novices that their minds reverted to their college tricks. It is nothing, he said indulgently ; let them alone ; in six months their thoughts will have taken another colour and another turn.

In the *Exercises* of St Ignatius, he set the highest value upon the Particular Examination, which he regarded as the surest and speediest way of reaching perfection. Would you know, he sometimes asked, the single point to which we may reduce all the resolutions of a Retreat ? It is to make our Particular Examination faithfully every day.

Such was the esteem of all for the fervent *Brother Porter*, that it was a common saying at Montrouge : We must not be discouraged if we are not all Ravignans. Once a novice asked what he was to do in some difficulty which had occurred to him ; he was told to apply to Br. de Ravignan. In that case, rejoined he, I know beforehand what I

must do ; I have only to choose the most difficult course.

F. Gury has left us a memorandum written with his own hand, and containing a clearer and more weighty testimony to the merit of his subject. He mentions his correct judgment, his practical good sense, and the strength of his character, in which all was praiseworthy except the remnants of sternness ; and he anticipates in him a particular fitness for the higher branches of teaching, for preaching, and for government. He concludes by what is most important, describing this novice of two years' standing as an interior man, mortified in all his passions, and full of supreme contempt for himself.

The time approached for his first vows, which are taken after the lapse of the two years of the Noviciate. The excellent M. Bellart seems to have been unable to make up his mind to resign his favourite Gustave de Ravignan ; though formerly repulsed, he returned to the charge. I have not found his letter, but I am able to give the answer which it called forth ; it may be regarded as a model of modest resolution and religious courtesy :—

“MONTROUGE, *October 9, 1824.*

“MONSIEUR LE PROCUREUR-GÉNÉRAL,—The letter which I have had the honour of receiving from you cannot fail to fill me with sentiments of gratitude for the interest and affection which you have been good enough to manifest in my behalf. Have the goodness to accept my humble and sincere acknowledgments. I recognise the same goodwill as you formerly showed me, and the charity which leads you to see goodness and truth everywhere.

“But however much I may esteem your remarks and your advice, your upright heart will, I am sure,

not take it in ill part if I am unable to adopt your counsels in relation to my religious vows.

“I have spent two years in the Noviciate of the Society of which I hope to be a member; I had previously passed six months at the Seminary. The advisers to whom during this time I applied—those whom Providence pleased to give me for my guides—all confirmed me in the vocation which I discovered within me. Time, reflection, prayer, the advice of wise and pious directors, are needed to give safety to a step of this nature; and I can answer before God that no one of these things has been wanting to me; and I see the time of my vows draw near, with, I protest, the greatest confidence and joy. And in case any one should believe that the question is still open with me, and should think that I have yet to decide upon my future, I may say that, long since, I took an irrevocable engagement before God, and that by pronouncing my vows I shall rather go through a pious formality than take on myself any new obligation.

“As to the anxiety felt by my mother on the score of my health and my pretended austerities, in the cause of truth I ask you to believe that my health is good; that the life we lead is simple and regular, but common and devoid of any practices of austerity, and that it suits me in every respect. God has in His goodness been pleased to lead me to embrace it; I will bless Him for this favour every day of my life, and by His grace I will persevere.

“I shall not omit sometimes to carry back my thoughts in His presence to those who were good enough to bear with me in the world, and who taught me betimes to relish the fatherly yoke of a mild authority.

“I must not forget to express the gratitude I owe for all your forbearance with me and solici-

tude ; I beg you to accept my sincere acknowledgments.—I am, with deep respect, your very humble servant,

“RAVIGNAN.”

From this letter we gather a private circumstance of his history. The eagerness of the novice to be a Jesuit had caused him, long before the canonical period, to take vows of devotion ; and nothing remained for him but to repeat in the presence of his brethren what he had already pronounced before God. Besides this, we notice an omission in the signature. Br. de Ravignan wished to efface all that recalled the world, and with this view he began to drop the particle which precedes his name. His superiors at first let him have his way, and by their silence seemed to approve of this revenge taken by modesty on vanity. But soon it was pointed out to him that the usage of the Society is more simple yet, when it leaves to each one the name appointed him by Providence. Was there not some danger of his doing just the opposite of what he intended, of proclaiming his rank rather than suppressing it ? The novice had gained merit by his humility ; he now gained much more by his obedience ; he therefore with great simplicity resumed his family name, still remaining convinced that under the standard of the Cross rank is gained only by humiliation.

As to austerities, the ex-lawyer speaks of them, but tells nothing ; he was not bound to give an account of his conscience to the Procureur-Général ; and he thought it enough to tell truth in this answer without telling the whole truth. He directs the magistrate's attention to the Institute, which certainly does not prescribe any exterior mortification as a rule ; but which, while it ordains a common life, allows austerities, and even recommends

them, subject to the safeguard of obedience, and within the limits of prudence.

His whole life through, F. de Ravignan made the most of what was allowed him in this matter. His tendency was towards excess, and to the last a tight rein was needed to keep him in. At a later period he kept for his own use a whole arsenal of instruments of penance : disciplines of cords, others armed with iron spikes, girdles beset with needle-points, haircloths of great size, shirts of rough material, bearing crosses, the name of Jesus, figures of the Sacred Heart—all formed by needle-points. This terrible shirt was fastened round the arms, and covered the chest, and marked the sacred signs on the living flesh in characters of blood. It still exhibits signs of long use. He preferred this severe instrument of penance to all others, and even near the end of his life, notwithstanding the prostration of his strength, he often put it on. To see his gait and motions, always free and seemingly easy, no one could have conjectured the straitness of his bonds. Death has made all known by leaving us these blood-stained relics.

St Ignatius, in his Institute, presumes that the Professed of his Society would be men who might be trusted to run in the path of penance by themselves. F. de Ravignan, after his profession, took this principle literally. He understood the regeneration of the flesh in the Gospel sense ; he reduced his body to servitude in order to set his spirit free ; and he suffered martyrdom that he might continue to be an Angel, and might become an Apostle.

As Br. de Ravignan entered the Noviciate on November 2, 1822, his time for leaving it was the morning of November 3, 1824. The two years having run their course, the Novice became a Scholastic. The same day he wrote from Montrouge the following note to his mother :—

“This morning I had the happiness of taking my vows, and I am to proceed at once to the Professed House, 35 Rue de Sèvres, there to remain as long as obedience shall appoint. Share in our Lord with your son his joy and calm satisfaction. Unite yourself with him, as he with you, in loving and praising God with an undivided heart. The time of uncertainty has gone by; all is fixed. May the Lord give comfort to your heart. Be it your part to admit the comfort which He shall send.”

The poor mother, however, could not admit into her heart any comfort from the joy of sacrifice. The more her son rejoiced in his vocation, the more did she sorrow over a separation now uncheered by any hope. The good son never wearied of grieving over her state of mind, and of assuring her again and again of his own happiness. Some days after his vows, his dutiful affection expressed itself anew:—

“It sometimes comes into my mind that once again my conduct towards you must have been blameworthy, because I have not yet succeeded, with God’s help, in restoring those relations between yourself and me which, I am convinced, ought to exist between a Christian mother and a son blessed with a religious vocation.

“Can it be that I have given you, or left in your mind, any prejudice against a Society to which I am bound by the dearest of ties, and to which I cling with my whole heart? Can it be that I have allowed you still to retain the impression that some earthly consideration, some earthly influence, has had any weight in my choice of a religious life? Have I been unsuccessful in convincing you, as your affection for me desired, that your son is where God has, of His own good-will, called him, amidst order and peace, in a family of brothers closely bound together by the love of our Lord,

and labouring solely for the glory of God : in a word, in the Society of Jesus, in a life of prayer and of union with the Sacred Heart of our Lord, the sweeter as it is more constant. If you are not thus calm and convinced in heart regarding me, I have at least again impressed on you my own perfect assurance on the point.

“You will allow me, then, while I humbly crave your pardon, to conjure you to join your son in believing that he is happy, and to share the certainty which God, by the peace He gives, grants that he is in his vocation. Your affection, so befitting a mother and a Christian, would find ease in partaking of my happiness, and in living in union with my vows to our Lord, and my entire consecration of myself to His service. My whole life will be given to this; and I feel that something would be wanting to me before God if my mother’s heart did not share my offering, and did not love what I shall ever hold so dear. I pray God to bless these thoughts which have occurred to me, and which I venture to lay before you.”





CHAPTER V.

SCHOLASTICATE.

Br. de Ravignan begins his Theological Studies at Paris—Completes them at Dôle—Is raised to the Priesthood—Ordinances of June 16, 1828.



F AITHFUL to the spirit and to the very letter of the Institute, Br. de Ravignan laid, during his noviciate, the foundation of solid virtue; he might now begin to raise the edifice of learning. He was now nearly twenty-nine; this is in the Society the usual age of beginning the preparation for the priesthood by the study of theology.

The Scholasticate, which for our young divines corresponds to the Seminary, underwent about this time several changes of place, which it will be necessary to mention for the better understanding of our story. The whole of the year 1825 was passed at the Professed House in the Rue de Sèvres. But this abode was ill adapted for study, and, in fact, unhealthy for the students. Want of space forced the scholastics into quarters immediately under the roof; they were ill lighted, and exposed alternately to great heat and cold. This was merely a temporary arrangement. In the

course of 1825 the theological classes were removed to Vitry, in the neighbourhood of Paris, and the following year to Dôle, in the Jura. In 1828 came the well-known ordinances which closed all our colleges in France. At this time the number of our students of theology had so increased, that it was necessary to divide them into two houses. A part remained at Dôle; the rest removed to Saint-Acheul. This arrangement continued until the Revolution of 1830 forced our young students to take refuge in Switzerland, which at that time showed us hospitality.

Br. de Ravignan was wholly indifferent to all these accidents, which affect only the surface of life. Whatever happened around him, wherever he might be placed, he was wrapped up in his business, wholly devoted to labour and to observance of rule. While in school his position never changed; he sat on a form, never leaning back, never turning his head, upright and motionless; his pen in his hand; his eyes fixed on the professor, or on his notes. He gave himself up to study, not passionately, but conscientiously. He scrupulously made the most of every minute of his time, but each employment came only in its own turn. All his labours were confined within the limits of his vocation, and were directed to God alone.

Br. de Ravignan's note-books of this period are a monument of his intense application and multifarious studies. Besides entire treatises on theology, drawn up by his own hand, and examination theses discussed in every detail, we find reflections on the Holy Scripture, and abstracts of writings of the Fathers, attesting a wide course of reading. He set about filling up an immense folio commonplace-book, in alphabetical order, in which he garnered up and arranged matter for future use. In this he entered the notes, which he took with

great judgment, for he was anxious to let nothing escape which he had once made his own. The entries consist of fragments of what he had heard read in the Refectory, striking passages from the exhortations given to the community, and miscellaneous matter, the fruit of his personal researches.

Br. de Ravignan, like a good religious, was greedy of time, and at first refused to take any of the recreation which is left to the free choice of the scholastics. But the remark was made to him that this conduct was excessive and singular. From this time he sought to reconcile the demands of labour and of edification, and he would come to the appointed spot a quarter of an hour before the end of the free time, and with calm gravity he took his part in the common relaxation.

Within the limits of the rule, the fervent religious showed himself obliging and compliant, with a kindness of manner sincere and hearty; but nothing on earth would induce him to stray from the right path, and, as in the Noviciate, his strictness approached rigidity. His brethren jokingly called him *Iron Bar*, and he himself laughed at the name with good-will. But F. Godinot, the French Provincial, a religious whose memory is held in veneration among us, once chanced to be present at the scholastics' recreation, and happened to hear the unlucky surname. At once he put on a grave look, and said seriously, "How is this, my brothers? a nickname among you? Such is not the custom of the Society." Thenceforth nothing more was heard of *Iron Bar*. I need scarcely say that these jests did not prevent justice being rendered to the generosity of his virtue; and a remark of one of his professors which has chanced to survive testifies to the common opinion: "If Brother de Ravignan is not canonised some day, I

do not know who can be ; if he does not reach the end, at least he uses the means heartily."

The year 1826, which Br. de Ravignan passed at Vitry, was marked in his annals by a double trial. As during his law studies, so now his courage was greater than his strength, and his health suddenly broke down. The head and the chest were affected at once. For six months all his studies were suspended, and the well-known physician Récamier prescribed the terrible remedy of doing nothing. Instantly the invalid shut all his books, and submitted to this course of life, so little familiar to him, with ready and even joyous abandonment of his own will, devoting himself to repose more heartily than of old he did to labour. The ex-magistrate became more than ever the child of obedience, and might be seen at one time practising gymnastics to give exercise to his arms, in the hope of throwing open his chest a little and giving more play to his lungs ; at another time digging in the garden, sweeping the walks, exactly as if he had been born a gardener. We may gather from this that natural taste was nothing to him, that duty was everything, and that his heart was always at peace in conforming itself to the will of God.

About this time occurred the death of M. Belart, whom Br. de Ravignan loved almost as a father. He obtained leave to go from Vitry to Paris to pray beside his coffin. On the way he could talk of nothing but his old master the Procureur-Général. He threw off his character, or rather habit, of reserve, and became communicative : his heart betrayed itself. His companion was astonished to find so determined a soul exhibiting such tenderness.

The same year he wrote to his mother : "The holy state in which I now live, and by God's grace

ever shall live, causes me better to appreciate and better to fulfil my duties and the needs of my heart for so worthy a mother. As your son becomes a better religious he will become a better son. Whatever events may occur outside my own soul, I confess I do not much attend to them. God's will is, that my interior disposition should never change, and that all my desires should be directed to preserving the precious grace of my vocation. Therefore, I conjure you by the love of our Lord, let us make this our starting-point; let us for the rest of our life love this foundation of our intercourse, and let us never doubt of drawing hence the fruit and the consolation which God has connected with it. Only be good enough to ask God to make your son a humble and holy religious, devoted to his own perfection and to working for souls: this, after all, is true happiness."

Br. de Ravignan found himself approaching the end of his scholasticate. He was soon to be a Priest, and to exercise the sacred ministry. Reflecting on the new obligations he was about to assume, he resolved to form himself anew. He knew well, better than any other man, that his determination of mind needed softening. Grace now was leading him towards meekness. He began therefore to turn all his energy against himself; and to effect a thorough cure, he punished his lapses with severity. He had been taught that there can be no law without a sanction. He excused himself in nothing. The smallest show of warmth in the scholastic disputes, the least harshness in word or manner at recreation, was immediately repressed and punished publicly. Sometimes for many days together he would kneel in the middle of the refectory, and accuse himself, and ask pardon for having again exhibited rudeness and temper: "*Quod adhuc me asperum et iracundum præbuerim,*"

and his voice dwelt unshaken on the adverb "*adhuc*," "*again*," with a marked accent perfectly expressive of his indignation against his relapses. Towards the end of the year 1827, the humble religious wrote: "The time is not far distant when I shall receive Holy Orders, and I am entirely occupied in the necessary preparations for this awful moment. We see how God calls to Himself even the most unworthy."

In 1828, shortly before Trinity Sunday, a small body of Scholastics found their way from Dôle to the Seminary of the Diocese at Orgelet, where Mgr. de Chamont, Bishop of Saint-Claude, was to hold his ordination. Before they set out, Br. de Ravignan was appointed to be Superior during the journey. One of the six who formed the party told me frankly that the temporary superiority thus granted filled the subjects with some fear. The good brother was respected, but he was feared, and, for the most part, no one was anxious to be treated by him as he treated himself. They were completely deceived. Nothing could exceed the kindness, the affability, the attentiveness to small wants, the simple joy of the young Superior. He availed himself of his character only to claim the right of choosing the last place, and of making himself the servant of all.

Some days after, the Ordinances of June 1828 were signed at Paris, and the news reached Dôle. It is not our duty to speak of them. We can only congratulate ourselves and bless God when the world casts us out. Br. de Ravignan wrote but few words on the occasion. It would be a great mistake, and would show but little acquaintance with his character, to believe that his heart was any way troubled. His family expressed some alarm as to his prospects, and he replied: "We remain undisturbed under the guidance of Provi-

dence. God will dispose of us as He shall please ; and come what may, we shall have the happiness of living and dying religious of the Society of Jesus. Our business is, while we await the future, to strive to pass the present time holily." In another letter he spoke with more confidence. A hope and almost a desire had been expressed that in case the Society were dispersed he would return home. He rejected this idea at the first mention, being thoroughly resolved that should the Society retain but one only house, he would seek it out at the ends of the earth. "I am a religious," he said, "and though very imperfect, am wholly devoted to my vocation, for which I bless God daily more and more. I am, and by God's grace shall all my life continue, a Jesuit. Why will you not admit that this is irrevocably fixed ? for it is so, happen what may. I know not what may be the upshot of our present position. Nothing, perhaps. But God rules all things around me according to His holy will, and within me He has been pleased to rule my affections and my thoughts. My duty, my joy, all my happiness, is in the holy life which I have embraced, to what position or place soever it lead me. This I say once for all, and say it to all that interest themselves in me."

Far from looking forward to retreat and to repose, the young Jesuit rather prepared himself for the struggle. He remembered what his former profession had been, and gave an early promise of what he was one day to do ; he gave up his theological theses to compose a legal argument. We find among his papers a complete memoir on the question of the legal existence of the Jesuits in France. It was drawn up at Dôle in 1827. It was the first sketch of a work which the advocate of the Society was to publish eighteen years later.

On June 21, the feast of St Aloysius Gonzaga,

the College of Dôle, once again before its dispersion, celebrated the memory of the angelic Patron of youth. Some mourning went along with this last feast on the eve of exile. The kindness of Mgr. de Chamont increased with our disgrace, and he made haste to come to comfort the scholars, and to share the grief of the Fathers. He condescended to offer to raise to deacon's orders the sub-deacons ordained on Trinity Sunday. This could be done in virtue of a privilege which, having regard to the uncertain state of affairs, it seemed prudent to use. The ceremony took place accordingly in the College Chapel, and it was agreed that the ordination to the priesthood should take place the following month in the chapel of the Bishop's residence at Saint-Claude. On the way from Dôle to Saint-Claude a trifling circumstance happened, which we may mention for its interest as a trait of character. It presents a curious mixture of the zeal of the old Deputy to maintain his right, and of the forbearance of the religious in the exercise of that right when once acknowledged. The party left Dôle on July 23, and made a stay at Lons-le-Saulnier, and there they hired for their own use—observe this—a private carriage, to take them on the 24th to the Episcopal city. That morning, long before the time of starting, the party went to the church to hear Mass. On returning, they found a supernumerary traveller, who had been installed by the driver on the front seat. This was a violation of a concluded contract. No one said anything, but there was one who had his own thoughts on the matter. He was merely waiting his opportunity. At the first hill they came to, the young people alighted; Br. de Ravignan allowed them to get a little in advance, but said not a word of what he intended to do; he then went straight up to the driver, and made his charge against him, in a

manner befitting a Crown advocate. The driver defended himself as best he could, or rather had no defence to make ; but the traveller hastened to dismount. But the old magistrate had obtained his end ; justice was satisfied ; the turn had come for charity to appear. Br. de Ravignan resumed his own manner, and addressed the traveller with the most perfect politeness ; he apologised for the annoyance to which he had been put, and begged him to keep his place for the rest of the journey. "Sir, you were quite in the right in accepting a place, but the driver had no right to offer one to you, and it was my duty to teach him a lesson." Having said this, he rejoined his companions, with no less composure than he had before shown.

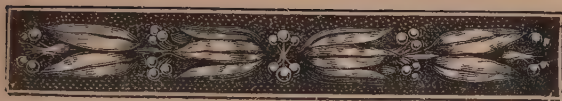
The ordination took place on July 25, 1828. From this day forward, Father de Ravignan will be the only name we shall meet ; in the Society, the name of Father belongs to priests alone.

After a week spent in retreat in thanksgiving to God, the young priest, on August 2, wrote a letter, inviting his relatives to share his happiness : "God has granted me the greatest of all graces by admitting me to the priesthood. A few days hence I shall be able to think at the holy Altar of a beloved mother, brothers, sisters, and relations. Believe, I ask you all, that to do so has always been, and ever will be, a great comfort to me. I beg you, ask God to render me less unworthy of so great a favour, and unite with me in thanking Him for it."

The world meantime was full of condolence for the young religious, who did not allow himself to be disturbed. Whenever the name of Ravignan, once so well known, chanced to occur in conversation, laments were never wanting over his quenched life, his talents thrown away, his promises for the future blasted, and astonishment was expressed

that the Jesuits did not properly value the treasure they had gained, or profit by the rare capacity of their subject. The Jesuits knew very well what they were about. St Ignatius makes no pretension to the art of forming men off-hand; on the contrary, he judged that a single labourer trained slowly, but rendered really perfect, would some day make a larger return than a hundred such as were hurried in the making, and failed in the end. The Institute prescribes long preparation, however much this may shorten the time of labour, provided the return of fruit be a hundred-fold. St Francis Xavier and St Francis Regis were thoroughly matured, and then ten years sufficed for their apostolate.





CHAPTER VI.

PERIOD OF TEACHING.

F. de Ravignan teaches Theology—His Peril during the Attack on Saint-Acheul in 1830—Exile in Switzerland—Retreats for the Clergy.



DE RAVIGNAN had now spent six years in the Society, two dedicated to the practical study of spirituality, and four to the sacred sciences ; yet he had gone through little more than half his preparation for the apostolic ministry. According to the plan of the Institute, the Scholastic becomes in turn a Professor ; exercise in teaching is needed, not only that the teacher's knowledge may be perfected, but that he may learn to impart his knowledge with more clearness and method. In the interval between the entry of Bourdaloue into the Society at sixteen, and his first appearance in the pulpits of Paris at thirty-six, he had for many years been engaged in teaching rhetoric, philosophy, and moral theology.

F. de Ravignan was destined to teach the science which he had just been studying. A few weeks were put at his free disposal. He employed them according to his custom, finding his repose in exer-

cises of charity and humility. At the time of the dispersion of the College of Dôle, the lay brothers, who were charged with various employments about the house, seemed quite upset: their past life had been so toilsome, the future appeared so gloomy; the trial of work beyond their strength to support was suddenly succeeded by the weariness of forced idleness beyond their courage to endure. A religious is like a soldier—to both demoralisation is disastrous. F. de Ravignan was able to impart to these afflicted souls something of the fulness of his own heart. With the leave of his superiors, he took in hand this work of kindness to his brethren; to it he sacrificed his vacation. He got the poor brothers together, exhorted, consoled, and encouraged them; often he would join them during his recreation, and he even went at their head on a pilgrimage to the shrine of our Lady of Mont-Roland. I learn these details from the last survivor of the little community, who for thirty years has persevered in his vocation and his gratitude.

The crisis of 1828 gave rise to many difficulties, and was ominous of more. After all, if we were refused liberty to instruct children, this only left us more time for our own studies. As the Society in France was not allowed to have public colleges, it was all the more earnest in training its younger members. The masters of schools came down from their desks and took their seats on the forms. Many were sent to Rome, many to Madrid, or to Brigue in the Valais, others to Saint-Acheul. This great college had been accustomed to see a thousand pupils within its walls; it was glad that its courts were once more frequented by young men, less noisy, doubtless, than its former inmates, but more industrious. There was not an hour's delay; on October 18, the feast of St Luke, the day appointed in the Society for opening the courses of

theology and philosophy, F. de Ravignan took possession of his chair, having joined the college on September 27. He had been five years a magistrate, he is now to be five years a professor—two years at Saint-Acheul, and, thanks to the Revolution of 1830, three at Brigue.

The young professor entered on his duties with his usual vigour. He began by studying side by side in the Institute the duties of a professor and the duties of his scholars, that he might be able to guide himself and direct others aright. We find among his papers two short treatises by him, dated at Saint-Acheul in 1829, the one for his private use, the other for the benefit of his pupils.

In the first of these treatises, which bears the title, "*Munus docendi Theologiam in Societate*," he has brought together and arranged under distinct titles whatever matter he found relating to the teaching of theology in the Bulls of the Sovereign Pontiffs, in the Constitutions of St Ignatius, in the General Congregations, and the various Rules of the Society; thus he depicted the pattern of a perfect professor, of which he resolved to make himself the living copy.

The second treatise is a plan of ecclesiastical studies. After pointing out the end of such pursuits, which is the knowledge and love of God, he enumerates the subjects, Holy Scripture, the Fathers, the Councils and Decrees of Popes, Theology, in its branches of Scholastic, Dogmatic, and Moral, Ecclesiastical History; and on each of these subjects he traces out a course of reading and a plan of study, showing what ought to be read, and how. All his suggestions seem dictated by the most practical good sense. He insists, not upon extent of erudition, but upon depth of knowledge; the learning he would have is profound, exact, well-ordered, with sufficient possession of the

matter to retain it, sufficient mastery to use it. "We must go to the original sources," he wrote, "read leisurely, re-peruse the more important parts, so as to mark whatever is fundamental, and mature it by reflection and prayer; we must analyse the matter and make it our own, just as if we were preparing to give an account of the work for the instruction of others." At the end of this little treatise, the author manifests at once his modesty and his wisdom, by submitting his remarks to the judgment of some persons of experience whom he names, and to whom he proposes a series of questions. This was his habit throughout life; this clear-sighted and humble religious, while his own judgments were most reliable, nevertheless sought advice from every side.

F. de Ravignan prepared his course of lectures with most conscientious care; to do this was his principal business, because it was his duty. After studying the Holy Scripture and the Fathers, in their original text, he went through the great theologians, dwelling particularly on his favourite authors, St Thomas and Suarez. "Having finished our other reading," he would say, "we must go back to St Thomas to sum up." After he had thus exhausted the subject, he drew up the summary of his lecture, attending as successfully to clearness in the details as to method in the arrangement.

At the beginning of his notes we find a proof of the foresight of the professor which deserves to be remarked. He reckons up beforehand the number of his lectures and his theses, which he distributes in such manner as to be sure of finishing within the appointed time.

F. de Ravignan's gifts of mind and conscientious study were certain to make an excellent professor of theology. On this point I shall content myself

with quoting the authority of the Rev. F. Rubillon, a former pupil of his, and now Assistant for France. He writes that "every one acknowledged the possession by F. de Ravignan of a rare talent for teaching. I readily recognise in him the realisation of the idea of a professor of theology, such as it is depicted by St Ignatius: safe, solid doctrine, drawn from Scripture, from tradition, from the decisions of the holy Church, from St Thomas, and from those great masters of theology of our Society, Suarez, Bellarmine, and others. Not that he neglected the theologians and philosophers of more recent times. He succeeded in giving a clear, precise idea of their systems, pointing out their strength, their weakness, or their danger. He used the scholastic form of instruction. He began with a thorough explanation of the *state of the question*, defining both things and words, pointing out what adversaries he combated, and stripping the question of all foreign matter: then he gave proof of his thesis from authority, and from theological reason, and concluded by the *fundamental argument, ratio ultima*, exhibiting the foundation and basis of the whole discussion, a thorough apprehension of which gave the key to the whole. On his way, he opened out profound views, and brought before us sublime images, calculated to be of great use for preaching."

Thus did F. de Ravignan, while employed in teaching, develop those high qualities which formed afterwards the features most noticeable in his eloquence, so that the professor may be said to have been the orator in germ. This just and full estimate of his theological teaching is founded on the courses he gave at Brigue; we must relate the events which after two years' interval drove him into the land of exile.

As early as 1829 an alarm was given at Saint-

Acheul, which prepared the way for the calamity of 1830. In the course of February, the Rector of the Academy at Amiens, without previous inquiry or any formality, wrote abruptly to the Superior, commanding him, in virtue of the Ordinances of June 16, to suspend the courses forthwith, and to dismiss the students, requiring him to send by the bearer of the despatch an answer whether obedience would be rendered to this order. F. de Ravignan did then, under the Restoration, what he was so often to do under the Government of July, he put himself forward to defend his brethren. After an interview with the Bishop of Amiens, he hastened to Paris, and had an audience with the Minister of Public Instruction: after three days he returned bearing the answer, Leave us profane learning, and we will leave you the sacred sciences.

But the College was not safe for long; the year 1830 came. The weakness of the Government ruined it, and it fell, after endeavouring to save itself by an act of vigour which could no longer avail to support it. Paris had had its Three Days, and some persons in Amiens, out of emulation, determined to have at least one glorious evening, that of July 29. Far be it from me to impute to this good town of Amiens the misdeeds of a few hundreds of miscreants, drawn into mischief by certain leaders, their heads inflamed with intoxicating liquors, and sure to gain more by the riot of an hour than by the labour of a day. The troops were waiting under arms; the authorities were deliberating. How else could it be? During the critical hours of an interregnum, no public officer can give orders, for he receives none. Nothing opposed the rising. The band of rioters wandered about for some time undecided, repeatedly passing and insulting the offices of the Prefect and Mayor; then suddenly, like one man, it started for a certain

point. A voice had been heard to cry, *To Saint-Acheul, Saint-Acheul*. Their leader was a former pupil of the college, whose bad conduct had led to his expulsion.

A squadron of cavalry was drawn up on the Boulevards, and saw the revolutionary band hastening towards Saint-Acheul; their commanding officer, who was connected with the Ravignan family, chafed with anger: in the twinkling of an eye he might have swept them away, but he was fettered.

The attack began about eleven o'clock in the evening, and no resistance could be offered. The gate was soon forced, and the crowd advanced into the inner court, and broke into all the rooms on the ground floor, uttering clamorous threats, and cries of most discordant import: some still cried, *The King and the Charter!* some, *The Emperor!* some, *Liberty!* all, *Down with the Priests!* *Death to the Jesuits!* Plunder and destruction at once began: whatever could be carried away, they took; what they were unable to take, they destroyed.

The inmates of the College might well think that their last night had come. The Rev. F. Guidée, the Superior of the house, went to pray before the Blessed Sacrament in the Chapel of our Lady: the Spiritual Father remained in his room hearing the confessions. Amidst these fearful events, F. de Ravignan was undismayed and almost calm; his heart was at peace in danger; he had never feared death, he would have been happy to sacrifice his life for his brethren. At the very beginning of the attack, he took his place on the balcony of the first floor without shelter from the missiles of the assailants. His object was to address the people, but their cries, and the noise of the demolition proceeding around him drowned

his voice. Some of the scholastics wished to summon assistance, and getting to the clock-tower began to sound the alarm-bell: the sound of it only excited the fury of the crowd.

F. de Ravignan, without leaving his post of peril, sent word to them to cease, and again endeavoured to make himself heard. With all his strength he shouted to the rioters: "We have done you nothing but good; why do you do us harm? Do you not see your danger? the soldiers will be here directly." Before he had ceased speaking, the alarm-bell was again heard, louder than ever. He had already narrowly escaped several wounds; but this time a shower of stones fell on the balcony, one of which struck his temple; the blood flowed copiously, and he was forced to withdraw.

A frightful uproar then began. In the middle of the night, while the alarm-bell was sounding mournfully, four or five hundred madmen were yelling at the top of their voices and without a moment's intermission, and were smashing with their bludgeons the windows, the doors, and the furniture; four of them who remained in the court, seizing an immense beam, drove it like a battering-ram against windows and doors; while one of their leaders never ceased from exhorting them in a stentorian voice to have Courage! Courage!

Comedy soon succeeded this tragedy. A cry of Drink, drink! began to drown every other, and the answering cry of Wine! here is wine! allayed the storm as if by magic. All hastened together to the court; the bottles were passed round; they went to work the shortest way, breaking off the neck, and throwing the bottle when empty through one of the windows. And now the appearance of a gendarme and a town-sergeant was quite enough to discompose the valour of these brave fellows,

who took their pay for attacking priests, but not for measuring their strength with soldiers. But a sound heard at this time put to flight the last remnants of their bravery; the long-expected order had at length been given; and the cavalry captain was leading his squadron at full gallop along the road to Saint-Acheul. The evacuation of the place was immediate; the mob were routed and left no stragglers; they dispersed in all directions; one party were met by the troops, surrounded, and conducted back to their original starting-point.

This scene of disorder had lasted only two hours; but Saint-Acheul was like a deserted house, without doors or windows: the court and the rooms were strewn with torn pieces of books and pictures, with fragments of glass and crockery, with the remains of the furniture. The morrow morning opened with a promise to be worse than the night had been. On the morning of July 30, repeated official messages of alarm of ever-increasing urgency were sent from Amiens. The precise time of the new attack was mentioned; the assailants were to return in mid-day. Under these critical circumstances, F. Guidée assembled his consultors, to provide means for the personal safety of the community. After long deliberation, the community were summoned together at half-past eleven, a place of refuge was appointed for each, and a little money furnished him; the Superior gave his benediction, they embraced and separated. Dinner was served, but no one touched it.

At the moment of departing, F. de Ravignan went to the chapel with one of the scholastics, who, with a view to this last necessity, had preserved his fast from the previous day. The Sacred Hosts were consumed, and the holy vessels placed where they would be safe from profanation: the Tabernacle, like the house, remained without an inmate.

The following day, July 31, F. de Ravignan kept the feast of St Ignatius amidst a crowd of sick persons; he had taken lodgings in the Hôtel-Dieu of Amiens.

On August 18, the Rev. F. Druilhet, the Provincial, a man truly raised up by Providence for the occasion, came into Picardy to gather together his scattered children. He summoned them, one after another, from their different hiding-places, and made them to share his own confidence and peace; and without the least mishap he in a few days made arrangements for sixty religious, assigning to each a residence, an office, and instructions. F. de Ravignan was at first intended for Spain, but finally he was sent into Switzerland, to continue at Brigue the course of lectures which he had begun at Saint-Acheul.

On passing the frontier he remained a Frenchman in heart, but became a Swiss in his mode of life. He reckoned these years among the happiest of his life, passed as they were far from the turmoil of cities, in the midst of the good people of the Valais, who, though devoid of worldly wealth, were rich with the wealth of the Gospel, and who saluted the Jesuits on the roads with the ejaculation, Praised be Jesus Christ! He loved too the grandeur of the mountain scenery, which raises the soul and disposes for prayer.

Doubtless F. de Ravignan had his share of the trials of this new state of things. It is all very well to have the vocation to be a citizen of the world, but the natural inclination does not always accompany it. The Swiss shared everything with the French like brothers; but, to tell the truth, they had nothing but poverty to share: the severity of the climate was another trial for a delicate and thoroughly southern constitution.

The Haut-Valais in the winter may challenge comparison with Siberia itself.

He was lodged in a miserable room with northern aspect, with no fire, and its ceiling open and communicating with the clock-tower, so as to let in a blast of ice-cold air. He said nothing about it, and he was wrong, for he very soon fell ill. The physicians apprehended water on the chest. It was then that the dilapidated state of his room was noticed. He was moved into another, and with warmth health returned.

At Brigue, as everywhere, F. de Ravignan showed himself devoted to the rule and to common life. He obtained, however, special leave to rise at three o'clock in the morning, and when an hour afterwards the community came down to the chapel, he was seen motionless on his knees before the altar. He generally took nothing till dinner, and his life appeared a perpetual fast. To render himself more worthy of celebrating the holy Mysteries, he purified his soul by confession every day. During the greatest colds of winter he was content with the common stove. To it he took his folios and worked at preparing his lectures under the eyes of his scholars just as if he had been alone, and his example was more instructive to them than his lectures. For two years he joined to his duties as professor those of the Minister of the Divines, and showed no less charity for all, especially the sick, than exactness and determination to support religious discipline. On this point he never yielded. But when a recreation day came he was ingenious in devising means for his scholars to profit by it. He was their companion and guide on their long walks over rugged mountain paths and glaciers.

In 1832 the young French Jesuits who were come together in Switzerland determined to offer

a proof of pious gratitude to that Providence which had protected them, and to the land which nurtured them as her own children. A chapel dedicated to our Lady, the Help of Christians, was the offering they were to make. F. de Ravignan zealously promoted this work. We may give a letter which he wrote relating to it:—

“Two leagues from Brigue, on a tolerably high hill called the Rohrberg, close by a small country-house of ours, we have conceived the idea of building a chapel in honour of Mary, under the title of Help of Christians—we who have been so kindly received and kept in safety here. It is very pretty, and is now almost finished; the whole cost of building and decoration is defrayed by some charitable souls.

“You see that I am going to ask you an alms for the sake of the Blessed Virgin, for you may easily believe that the expenses are greater than our means and our expectations. You will thus help us to thank our Blessed Lady for the favours which she has heaped upon us, and for the holy asylum to which she has gathered us. If you only knew how well off we are here under her shield and with the hosts that she has given us. Your names will be enrolled in the list of benefactors, and inclosed within a heart which will be hung before the image of our Blessed Lady.

“It seems that there are a great many things happening in the world; but we are not of this world, we are seeking a better.”

The sanctuary was opened with all the solemnity that time and place allowed. As a memorial of this feast in their exile, F. de Ravignan preserved copies of all the compositions which gratitude inspired on the occasion—odes, hymns to Mary, songs on the theme of Helvetia, addresses to the chief people of the locality. He was fond after-

wards of turning his walks in the direction of the humble cottage and the holy Chapel of Rohrberg.

About the same time a contagious malady broke out in the hospitable little town. The population was decimated. In a few days, out of six hundred inhabitants there were sixty deaths. F. de Ravignan, it deserves to be remarked, was one of the first to beg permission to devote himself to the service of the sick, and his tone in doing this was almost a supplication. But the Superior did not think proper to comply with his wish; the Professor must remain with his pupils, leaving the Swiss missionaries alone to attend to the sick.

At Brigue he received the following letter, written from Rome by one of his Brethren:—"O, my Father, to humble ourselves ever more and more is our only business. All the rest we must leave to God's Providence. *Tu recumbe in novissimo loco*, 'Sit in the lowest place.' Let us avail ourselves of every help for going constantly lower down, and let us not busy ourselves with aught else. *Humiliari in Societate Jesu et æternam beatitudinem consequi*, 'To be humbled in the Society of Jesus, and to gain everlasting happiness.' Thus said St Ignatius, and he left all else as a parenthesis and a blank, for it is for God to fill it up. Prepare yourself for the Cross. Wherever you are, try to concentrate all your power on contempt of yourself; love Jesus Christ alone, but let it be Christ crucified." This letter, so full of the holy folly of the Cross, suited F. de Ravignan well. He therefore put it aside among his spiritual treasures, among which we found it.

As F. de Ravignan was charged with a portion of the duties of the Spiritual Father, he commonly gave the usual exhortations to the community. He also twice a year gave the Retreat in preparation for the renovation of vows, and sometimes he

addressed sodalities of youths in their chapels, or the faithful in the public church of the college. We still possess all his notes, which are drawn up in Latin, and dated with precision. During the vacations he found his rest from the labour of teaching by exercising abroad the holy ministry. In the month of September 1831 he gave a Retreat to the Priests of the Haut-Valais, who assembled in the college at Brigue, and in August 1832 to the Canons of Saint-Maurice.

Before beginning these more important works, the humble religious had sought the direction of F. Godinot, a former Provincial of France, but at that time Master of Tertians at Estavayer, in the Canton of Fribourg. His answer in Latin, dated from Estavayer on July 12, 1831, is now before us. F. Godinot confines himself to mentioning what he would himself do. He would follow as closely as possible the Book of the Exercises as to both matter and method. He would try to secure absolute silence even during recreation time; and he concludes by submitting his advice to the judgment of him that sought it. "*Hæc raptim dicta meliori relinquo judicio.*"

F. de Ravignan received every word of F. Godinot as an oracle from heaven. The answer, moreover, was agreeable to his own views. The Exercises of St Ignatius were given accordingly during one week. The preacher spoke four times every day, always in Latin, in conformity with the custom of the country in ecclesiastical discourses, and these good Priests kept silence the whole time like Novices.

At the end of the ecclesiastical Retreat given at Brigue, at the moment of parting, F. de Ravignan's hearers threw themselves on their knees to beg his blessing. The modesty of the young religious took fright at seeing this. He withdrew

hastily and sought shelter in his own room, which lay at the other end of the house. But at the request of some of the principal persons among the Clergy, the Rector went to fetch him, brought him back, and commanded him to give the blessing they asked for. He had no choice but to obey.

Some difficulties were found in applying the Exercises of St Ignatius to public Retreats. F. de Ravignan wrote upon the subject to F. Renault, at that time Master of Novices at Avignon, who possessed a remarkable knowledge of the Book of the Exercises, the use of which he had been one of the first to restore among us in France. F. Renault *looked upon it as a great blessing*—they are his own words—that such a man as F. de Ravignan had been gained over to the cause of the Exercises. He regarded it therefore as a duty to reply to his question with all the care and fulness that its importance demanded. His letter is dated December 8, 1831, Feast of the Immaculate Conception. It forms a short treatise on the mode of giving the exercises in public. Its length will not allow us to quote the whole, but we think we cannot avoid giving some passages from a writing which exercised much influence on the apostolate of the Preacher of the Retreats of Notre-Dame.

“The Book of the Exercises is the spiritual arsenal where you will find the heavenly arms which have been prepared for you. It is a present bestowed by God on the Society. To this book are due the founder, his companions, the constitutions, nay, all that the Society has done for her own members or for others.”

F. Renault then gives a short abstract of the Exercises, and proceeds to reply successively to all the questions which had been proposed to him. He meets with the objection that all Retreats given on

the plan of St Ignatius would be alike. His answer is as follows:—

“There are some works of such marvellous and surpassing excellence, that their contemplation never wearies; such are the beauties of nature, and in the order of grace the Mysteries; if a master teach us how to look at them, we shall be unable to tear ourselves away. The source of the evil is that many among us are not sufficiently acquainted with the Book of the Exercises. We are like a beginner who finds himself provided with a most excellent instrument, which is capable of producing music in every style, soft or martial, with the widest range, from which heavenly harmony might be drawn. But what use is the instrument to the beginner? He will play through his tune, more or less well; but if you ask for a variation, only one, he complains of his instrument, and asks for another. It may be that our ideas have been narrowed by the books printed with the title, Retreat of St Ignatius, and containing an application of the Exercises to particular topics. St Ignatius was destined by Divine Providence to form a society of apostolic men, and he drew up, or rather God inspired him with, a plan which can never be too much admired; the plan is boundless in its extent, but can be contracted at will; it is available for every case, and suits every person; it is equally suitable for converting souls, instructing them, or forming them to perfection in every state, and it does all this at once. St Ignatius received this precious gift of the Exercises for the use of his Society, and he has passed it on as a heritage to his children. Their part is to learn to use it; their vocation gives them the necessary grace. When once they know this, the Exercises, though they remain fundamentally unchanged, will in their skillful hands submit to every modification, suit every

purpose admirably. The retreats they give will not then be their own retreats, nor exactly retreats of St Ignatius, they will be retreats given by the Father and by the children."

In the month of September 1833, F. de Ravignan bade farewell to the residence at Brigue, and to our Lady of Rohrberg; he went into France to give a retreat to the Sisters of Charity at Besançon, but soon he returned into Switzerland and proceeded to Estavayer.





CHAPTER VII.

THE THIRD YEAR OF PROBATION.

F. de Ravignan in the School of the Exercises—Rural Missions—His Thoughts on entering Public Life.



DE RAVIGNAN, after having spent eleven years in the Society, and reached the age of thirty-nine, proceeded at length to begin what we call the Third Year of Probation. He has described to us his recollections of his Noviciate at Montrouge ; he must also tell us his impressions of the third year at Estavayer. These were the two periods of his hidden life which he ever most cherished in his heart. A passage of F. de Ravignan's work on the *Existence and Institute of the Jesuits* will show the reader the object of this concluding test, which he calls the masterpiece of the skill of St Ignatius.

“The man whom St Ignatius designs for the apostolic ministry, has passed two years as a novice in recollection and silence ; then have followed nine years of study, and five or six of teaching ; he has received priestly ordination, and he has not yet exercised the functions of the priesthood ; generally he is thirty-three years of age, and fifteen or sixteen years of his religious life have elapsed :

religious and priest as he is, he must go back to the Noviciate. Again, for a whole year, he must give up all study and all intercourse with the outer world. The greatest pains have been taken to cultivate his intellect ; now he must, as a last test, and a last preparation, exercise himself, to use the remarkable expression of the Constitutions, in the school of the heart, *in schola affectus*. This expression is hard to understand ; I needed the whole course of the year to penetrate its sense ; I cannot pretend to explain it here.

“ I will say this only : the religious priest may have acquired extensive and various knowledge ; he may already have given proofs of devotedness and zeal ; in the deepest solitude, in a life of retreat and silence, brought more immediately face to face with God and himself, he must, before being devoted to others, himself go through a period of close application *in schola affectus*, application to whatever can strengthen and advance him in sincere humility, in generous renouncement of his own will and even of his judgment, in stripping himself of all the lower tendencies of nature, in gaining a deeper knowledge, a greater love of God, in order that having thus braced his soul, having made yet further advance in this truly spiritual life, he may be the better able to help others to go forward in the same paths, to the glory of God and of our Lord.

“ This is the nature of what is called in the Society *the third year of probation*, the last year of preparation and trial.

“ It passes quickly by, this time of holy repose which shall never return.

“ I have shared its happiness, and never again shall I share it until I die ; whatever number of years on this earth God has in store for me, the year of repose will never again be mine.

“During this time the perfect course of the Exercises is again pursued for an entire month ; the times of prayer and meditation are prolonged : the spirit of the Institute, the conditions of labour in the Apostolate, poverty, endurance, obedience, all the points which form the duty of religious, are studied anew and deeply pondered. The only interruption of the solitude is found in occasionally teaching the Catechism to little children, or perhaps in giving a mission to the country people ; these occupations are a prelude to the works which are dearest to an apostolic heart. I confess, I look back with pleasure on the period when it was my fortune to preach the Gospel to a few mountaineers ; often subsequently have I longed for a return of that time ; often has the work of an Apostle in great cities brought sadness to my spirit and weariness to my heart ; and the young men whom it is so often my happiness to see gathered around my pulpit will excuse me from thus looking back on the past with regret, when I say to them, with all the sincerity of my heart, that they have never given me anything but consolation.”

Estavayer was well suited for a place of retreat. The house stands on the bank of the Lake of Neufchâtel, the waters of which wash the garden wall. The view is bounded by the chain of the Jura which separates Switzerland from Franche-Comté. But in the lovely solitude, F. de Ravignan found his greatest happiness in being under the guidance of F. Godinot. He felt great veneration for this excellent old man, at oncé so firm and so gentle, and remarkable alike for his knowledge of the spiritual life, and of the peculiar rules of our Society. In F. Godinot, F. de Ravignan thought he saw an exact copy of St Ignatius, and to the end of his life he preserved as a relic a small picture bearing his signature. On his death-bed he

had another more valuable relic of the same revered master. When at Estavayer, he often knelt before a crucifix of brass and wood, belonging to F. Godinot ; he did not know that Providence destined him to breathe his last while in the act of kissing this same pious image.

F. de Ravignan made haste, with a guide so trustworthy, to enter on the Exercises ; he was to remain in retreat for thirty days ; may I say that he never again left retreat ? During this month of blessings he received from on high a marked grace, the gift of understanding the Book of the Exercises. From this time, that book became his manual, and served him instead of a whole library. He was filled with it ; and we may express his view and our own, by saying that he was the Son of the Exercises, for by means of them he formed himself, and by means of them he accomplished all his other works.

After this long retreat, which was devoted to prayer alone, he employed the holy leisure his retirement ensured him, in a course of devout study of the Exercises and the Constitutions. These two subjects go well side by side, not merely because the author is the same for both, but yet more because they seek the same end by identical means. The Exercises contain the Institute in germ, the Institute reduces to practice the principles of the Exercises. There remain to us collections of some extent on these twin subjects, made by F. de Ravignan at Estavayer ; under the title of *Casus Instituti*, he drew up a great number of regular theses on the most important and most practical points of the Institute. In the form given them we may trace the hand of the lawyer and of the theologian. Besides these, he undertook a complete treatise on the Exercises, containing a commentary on that original text, which is at once so

terse and so full of meaning ; and a detailed plan of a thirty days' retreat, with explanations of the rules and methods of the Exercises, developments of all the subjects of meditation, and notes of the books and passages to be read and admonitions to be given.

The progress made by this scholar in the School of the Heart was such that F. Godinot did not hesitate to employ him as master for the others, by throwing upon him a part of the burden of directing the Long Retreat. No surprise was felt at this unusual delegation of authority, except by the person to whom it was made. It was on this occasion that he drew up the Treatise of which we have spoken. We will present to the reader a few lines breathing gratitude to the author of the book, which he was called on to explain and to reduce to practice :—

“ Manresa is our birth-place.

“ The thirty days' retreat of our Holy Father makes us his children in his heart ; twice in our life does it make us really his children, before our first vows and before our last.

“ St Ignatius had experience of this retreat under the immediate direction of the Holy Spirit. He wrote his admirable Book of Exercises, and has bequeathed it to us as the creative type of the Religious of the Society.

“ He desired to oblige us, by a solemn rule, to gain familiarity with the Exercises ; we ought to acquire dexterity in their use, for they are the spiritual arms most suitable for our daily conflict, and for the sanctification both of ourselves and of the souls entrusted to our care.

“ O my blessed Father ! wise is thy work and enticing, great and of much profit ; the Spirit of God inspired thee. Happy is he that loves and relishes this Book with which Heaven inspired our

father. He will find there an unfailing spring of consolation, a prolific source of good, a remedy for all evils, be they the greatest to which the soul of a religious is exposed.

“O my soul! enter with generosity upon thy course; fear not, nor shun the combat! Up from thy repose! *exercise thyself*; thou shalt suffer, but thou shalt conquer; raise thy head a little, to fix thine eyes on heaven and to pray; thou shalt find peace, bitter though it may be.

“Is it nothing to regulate a life according to God’s law, by a victory obtained over one’s inclinations, and one’s reluctance? Is it nothing to restore divine order in the soul, and to preserve it as the most noble and most precious of conquests? To gain this is worth all that it costs in labour and suffering, in tears and in blood.

“To order and regulate according to God’s will, one’s whole conduct, one’s whole existence; such, blessed Father, is the end of thy Exercises. Thus do we gain our object by self-conquest. *Vincat seipsum*. Thus are deliberation and determination free, thus are reason and will delivered from slavery. Thus God becomes master of the soul; therein He establishes order and peace, but it is by way of struggle and of the Cross.

“Father, this is all; and thou wilt be pleased when once thy children attain this their aim. I understand it well; it is enough, it is everything for the soul.

“The building is complete, the temple is raised to the honour, and after the likeness, of Jesus crucified. Come, Jesus, come!”

F. de Ravignan showed the simple fidelity of a novice in writing abstracts of the exhortations and instructions given by F. Godinot. Of these numerous pieces, I have selected one note only for insertion here, on account of the personal reference

which it contains. It will show us how the prudent guide moderated the harshness of his scholar's character:—"One day in February 1834, F. Godinot spoke to me on the subject of a certain soreness of manner, which might have arisen out of an instruction he had given upon regularity and modesty. 'What I am going to remark,' said he, 'is the fruit of the serious reflection and experience of many years. By firmness, by severity, or by an authoritative tone, external regularity may be secured, and a certain effect in governing men. But true and solid advance in virtue, a disposition favourable to God's service and the good of religious life, can be hoped for only by gaining hearts, and leading them by direction to love that which we wish to obtain from them.'"

The perusal of the letters written by F. de Ravignan about this time makes us share the peace which he was then enjoying. "Day follows day," he said, "and they flow on in quiet uniformity, while we hear the roar of the storm in the distance. A large portion of our time is spent in prayer and holy exercises. We beg to be enabled to save many souls, and to be made worthy of this employ. Care of my soul occupies me, and the storing up provisions for the rest of the journey, and occasionally I am employed, not without some consolation, in some small exercise of the ministry among the good Swiss peasantry."

Towards the end of the year of probation he wrote as follows, in reply to M. Gossin:—"My very dear old colleague, it is true that we are dead to the world, but you are not the world to which we are dead. Friends like you can never be forgotten; to them we are ever attached *in visceribus Christi*, for unity of faith and of charity is the strongest of bonds.

"You have chosen, as it seems to me, the better

part; a life in retirement, full of occupation, independent and calm. Your wishes are moderate, and are conformed to God's will. Why should men weary themselves in following a splendid career? Happy are we that we understand the vanity of all things. Let us join in blessing the Lord from the bottom of our hearts.

"Here we are undisturbed; how long will it last? God knows, that is enough for us. We are children dear to the heart of a good Father; how can we feel anxiety? Be assured that our contentment never varies. Pray that we may make good use of our holy vocation."

Another letter, written on July 5, will take us into the midst of the poor mountaineers to whom he carried the Gospel:—"Five missions have been given in the lower Valais, at Champérie, Monthey, Saint-Maurice, Portvalais, and Outre-Rhône; and three other parishes, which alone remain unvisited in this part of the Valais, Viona, Vouvry, and Réverculat, are begging earnestly for missionaries. Pray a great deal, and beg for many prayers: it is important to finish the work; so we shall set out again next week. Let us take courage; the grace of the Society is great."

None of these villages of the lower Valais, scattered along the road from Geneva to Sion, makes a great show on the map, nor has any appreciable weight in the balance of politics. Yet F. de Ravignan took no less interest in this little world than in the world of Paris and the court; for he saw equally everywhere souls ransomed at the price of the Blood of Jesus Christ.

These missions must have been very toilsome. Each of them lasted a fortnight, and on each day there were four exercises, between half-past five in the morning and seven in the evening; the intervals were devoted to confessions. Two missionaries

were sent together, according to the Gospel example, and they divided the work like brothers. Thus, at Vouvry, F. de Ravignan preached in conjunction with F. Estève, who is now a missionary in Syria; their distribution of the sermons was such that I count thirty as delivered by each.

On the conclusion of the missions, F. de Ravignan gladly returned to his retreat at Estavayer, there to refresh his soul with meditation and prayer. Let us allow him to explain in his own words the need of an apostolic man for an interior life.

"A religious, and especially a religious of the Society, must be a man of God. God is at once our starting-point and our goal; it is a common saying that we leave God to go to God.

"If we have not an interior spirit, if we live not a life of prayer, we set out on the voyage of active life with soul void of God, a wretched boat without a steersman. Who shall give us support and encouragement under the torture of toil when busy with our work? Our strength will flow away; we shall no longer have the powers, or rather the weakness, of man's nature. It will be in vain to invoke the aid of natural resources, of talent, knowledge, reputation, the favour of men. Vain are such resources, treacherous such supports; such allies are no friends of an Apostle, and destroy his work. Death lurks among them, and too often seizes those who come to seek life at our hands. And we, too, shall die to our holy vocation, for it is altogether supernatural, spiritual, and divine.

"And what shall we say of the goal when once he has started?

"A religious is a working man travelling along the road; he has no lasting resting-place here below. No place, no day, no hour is his own; he goes on his course devoted to the service of a master. Yet some place of refuge and repose he

must have ; there must be some resting-place, if but for a moment, some point to strive to reach, in order to start afresh. Where shall we find this but in prayer alone, and in the sacred asylum of the interior life ? In the course of our journey, just as at its end, after the labour and fatigue of a weary day, whither shall we fly for refuge, where repose, to whom apply for help, if not to that beloved Master whom alone we serve, and whom our desire is to serve unceasingly ? He is our soul's best friend, our comfort and support. We did not wish to quit Him, but we have received His orders to go about His work. When we return, our task completed, when we have spent our allotted time toiling in the vineyard, then, to Thee, my Lord and Master, will I offer my labour, surrender all to Thee, and give Thee all ! For Thy sake I left Thee and went to my labour ; it is right and needful that I should find my rest in Thee, in the peace of prayer and of Thy holy love.

“Then is our strength renewed ; we come back to the well-spring, to the life, to slake our thirst, to regain our vigour. We forget much then, for God will have it so ; we keep only the memory of the thought of our holy destiny which He had impressed on our soul ; we feel how right it is that we live and act for God, yea, and suffer for Him, for He is our great Recompense.

“I cannot, I confess, understand how the spirit of an Apostle, of a religious, can exist, without that interior recollection, that love of prayer, the desire and practice of which the Book of the Exercises ought to make so fervent in us.

“I may see a man endowed with motion, hear words spoken, observe a hand engaged in writing, witness eager and wearying activity ; all these things will have a likeness to good, will sometimes seem to have brought about good : but I take up

the Book of the Exercises and I say, 'The man formed by this book, the man who can pray as this book teaches, he is the child of our blessed Father, he is the Religious of the Society, he is the Apostle within the sphere which obedience has marked out.'

At the end of the third year of probation he was called upon to return to France. "If you will only give F. de Ravignan up to us," said at the time the Rev. F. Staudinger, Provincial of Switzerland, "I agree to carry him on my shoulders from Estavayer to Brigue." The French religious himself felt some regret in leaving his calm and holy retreat. Obedience summoned him to Saint-Acheul. On his way he gave three Retreats: at the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Montet, near Estavayer; at the Noviciate of the Sacred Heart at Paris; and at the Episcopal Seminary at Evreux.





CHAPTER VIII.

VARIOUS WORKS.

*F. de Ravignan Minister at Saint-Acheul—Superior at Bordeaux—
His earliest Stations—His Government.*



DE RAVIGNAN reached his post on Nov. 2, 1834. Saint-Acheul was again inhabited, and had become a house of prayer, as it could no longer be a house of study. Twenty priests were already assembled there to begin their third year of probation. F. Fouillot was their Superior and instructor; F. de Ravignan, while filling the office of Minister, assisted him, and sometimes supplied his place. He used to say that he was just fit to be Minister, and for nothing else. It is true that he had all the qualities needed in the office; for he had a natural love of discipline, order, punctuality, cleanliness, decency; and the Superior might safely trust his memory and exactness, with the assurance that, under the quick eyes of the Minister, no want would go unsupplied.

In the month of January 1835, the work of giving the exercises of the Long Retreat was entrusted to F. de Ravignan by his Superior, who had heard

of what he had done the previous year at Estavayer. His business was, therefore, four or five times a day, for a month together, to address the assembled priests, each of whom had had at least ten or twelve years' experience in religious life. But F. de Ravignan was already a perfect master of the Exercises, and was skilled in using them. The treatise he had prepared at Estavayer now served him a second time; often did it serve him afterwards. This Retreat of 1835 gained him, among us, a deserved reputation for an uncommon degree of understanding in the methods of St Ignatius; and as he did not begrudge others the fruit of his study and thought, the acquisition of one became the property of many.

At length Lent came, and F. de Ravignan, at the age of forty, appeared for the first time in a pulpit of importance. In the magnificent cathedral of Amiens the first tones of the orator of Notre-Dame were heard. He still retained his office of Minister at Saint-Acheul, and had little time to himself; he was therefore forced to give only six Conferences and the sermon on the Passion.

A certain halo of glory had already attached to the name of Ravignan; after ten years of obscurity and silence it seemed again to shine. Curiosity was excited; many hastened to see and hear how the magistrate would acquit himself as a preacher. So weak are men, a name will draw them, as a word will lead them away; but if brilliancy is needed to bring them to the church, excellency alone will make them stay. F. de Ravignan saw his pulpit surrounded by an increasing crowd of discriminating listeners. The Bar especially were constant in attendance, and seemed glad to enhance the value of the offering which they had made to the Church, and proud to recognise in the orator an old and honoured colleague.

F. de Ravignan set forth the Catholic teaching with all that loftiness of intellect, air of conviction, and tone of authority which were afterwards to give so much power to his words. It had long been his well-weighed belief that in all true eloquence on grave matters, and much more in sacred eloquence, the orator ought not only to forget himself, but, moreover, to cause his audience to forget him; that he ought therefore to avoid all pretence and display, all show of learning and affectation of rhetoric, all marvels of wit, novelties of style, and peculiarities of action. All these little arts, he thought, hinder the chief effect; they amuse, but they distract, and fix upon the person of the speaker a part of the attention of which the whole is due to the matter delivered. This style seemed to him an exhibition fit for the school or the theatre; he had no intention of making a show of himself in a church. He would exclaim sometimes, "Why cannot we speak in the pulpit as they speak in the legislature? There, every true orator is simple; they do not display cleverness, and the reason is, that they are clever."

A deep impression was produced in Amiens; the minds of men were gained, and more than one soul was brought back to God. Many persons called for a continuation of the Conferences after Easter; but it was thought more prudent to avoid cloying their appetite.

The first care of F. de Ravignan was to thank the Blessed Virgin for the blessing by which she had encouraged his first efforts; for before acting he placed all his confidence in Mary, and when his work was over, to her he ascribed all his success. He had been fond of visiting our Lady of Montroland, of going to the shrine of our Lady of the Rohrberg; now he wished to make a pilgrimage to our Lady of Albert. On Easter Monday he

set out with two of his religious brethren, walked a distance of fourteen leagues, and returned on the following day, having gained all that he looked for, much consolation and much fatigue.

An attack of sickness, sufficiently serious to give rise to some uneasiness at first, came on in the course of May, and perhaps was occasioned by this pious excess. Happily it was checked in time ; and by order of the physician he was sent for change of air to Boulogne-sur-Mer. It grieved him not a little to be forced to remain at rest, away from the associations of religious life ; the desire to return quickened his recovery, and on June 13 he returned to Saint-Acheul, which he had left upon the 9th.

Notwithstanding the Minister's preference for a humble employ, he soon received orders to exchange his office for another ; and from the date July 17, 1835, the work of preaching gained him for itself. He was appointed, however, to remain another whole year at Saint-Acheul, to spend the time in preparation and practice, while he awaited the further designs of Providence.

F. de Ravignan, through the influence of an ascendancy which is more easily felt than described, began to take a commanding position. At home there was absolutely nothing to distinguish him from his brethren, except perhaps his humility, which placed him below them : abroad, he drew the eyes of all upon himself, and already it became usual that men should take him alone as the representative of us all. All negotiations with the local authorities were conducted by him ; as soon as a difficulty arose, he must intervene to remove it. In September many of Ours were sent abroad, and the Prefect obstinately refused to allow them passports. F. de Ravignan came forward ; all doors flew open before him, all the docu-

ments were granted. The Prefect had heard him in the cathedral, and was anxious to hear him again in private, and shortly afterwards came himself to Saint-Acheul to return his visit. Those who saw F. de Ravignan at a distance esteemed him ; those who saw him near loved him.

The Lent course of Conferences was resumed at the cathedral during Advent with equal success. At length, in 1836, the preacher, while yet ignorant of his destiny, made his way towards the scene of that great mission which Providence had in store for him. The Sovereign Pontiff, Gregory XVI., was one day to decree him the title of *Apostle of Paris*. It was now time for him to make a first acquaintance with the great city. Paris listened to F. de Ravignan preaching throughout Lent. The station at the Church of St Thomas of Aquin was very favourably noticed by the newspapers, and introduced the Conferences at Notre-Dame for the following year.

F. de Ravignan, ever impatient to escape from honour, quickly withdrew from Paris. According to his pious custom of returning thanks to the Blessed Virgin on the completion of his undertakings, he first went on a visit to the ancient sanctuary of our Lady of Liesse ; and as soon as his debt of gratitude was paid, he returned to hide himself at Saint-Acheul. He was very much fatigued, and thenceforth suffered from a painful affection, which heralded long before the infirmities we shall hereafter have to remark in him. This time he suffered in the head rather than in the chest : chronic neuralgia had already become his habitual state. The remedy he usually employed was remarkable : he sought repose and cure by going into retreat. Once only, on the present occasion, the evil became worse by this treatment ; after three days, not without regret, he was forced to

close the Book of the Exercises, and he lamented it with the following words: "I am incapable of work and application alike; yet I have great need of both. Only let God's will be done in all things."

About this time F. de Ravignan heard something said of a station during Advent at Bourdeaux. This news at once set his conscience in alarm. He feared that some busy person had been interfering, and he well knew that the life of a Religious and an Apostle must be independent of flesh and blood. He therefore wrote at once to his mother, in terms which recall the answer of our Lord: *Why did ye seek Me? knew ye not that I must be about My Father's business?*

"However great may be my desire to see you, my dear mother, I venture to think that you will agree with me, that with regard to this scheme for Advent we must consult solely the greater glory of God; and that you, like myself, will leave the care of directing it entirely to Divine Providence. Let us not, I beg, mix up with it any private motive or consideration. The works of the sacred ministry must be directed solely by heavenly principles."

However it may have come about, Mgr. de Cheverus, Archbishop of Bourdeaux, asked for F. de Ravignan for the Advent station of 1836, as he might well have done without any external influence. The preacher was relieved from his scruple, and bowed to obedience; he at once addressed to his brother the following letter, in which affection for his family and the religious spirit are admirably blended:—

"You will have heard of the answer of my superiors to the Archbishop of Bordeaux. I am glad of it; God has arranged it, and we shall meet again. Be so good as to explain to my mother that Providence having so ordered it, I shall be happy to be near her once again, and to visit her

as often as my occupations allow. She will not take it in ill part that I shall stay at the Archbishop's residence, which has been offered me, or at the Seminary, whichever his Grace shall think right. My only motive is to conform the more closely to our customs and the practice of religious life, and to be more at liberty in the conduct of my work.

"Tell me confidentially, as a brother, whether there were any steps taken on the part of my family to have me called to Bordeaux. I should be glad to know ; but even if it were so, I should not make any complaint against you. Pray God to bless His work, and to help us in converting sinners."

I must, however, mention that the wish of Mgr. de Cheverus met with more than one obstacle. Mgr. de Quélen, Archbishop of Paris, at first opposed the project, fearing lest the Advent at Bordeaux should hinder the success of the Lent at Paris. The physicians also gave a similar opinion. While these debates were going on, the Religious wrote the following answer to his Superior :—"I will speak, Reverend Father, in all simplicity ; my will is perfectly indifferent ; I shall be equally happy whether I go to Bordeaux or do not go. Be kind enough to send me a single word as a definitive answer."

It has been said that the Bordeaux station disappointed expectation ; it is quite possible. Perhaps it was merely a verification of what is said in the Gospel, *No man is a prophet in his own country*. Perhaps the orator was to be fortified by humiliation against danger from the applause which awaited him in Paris. It may, at all events, be said that all these fluctuations of opinion, all the success, good or bad, with which his efforts met, had become to F. de Ravignan matters of complete indifference ; very far from affecting him,

they did not even touch him. A hundred times has one of his brethren heard him say, "I am not conscious whether I speak well or ill; it is something outside me." And when the other answered, that for his part he was perfectly conscious when he succeeded more or less badly, he would add, "Oh, you listen to what people say. For myself, I do not busy myself with it. All my desire is, that the servant should be humbled and the Master glorified."

The preacher, when his Advent was over, gave at least a few hours to his family, and even visited the Château de Ravignan. There was no difficulty in recognising him: in heart he was ever the same Gustave. He was found to be as affectionate as of old, and much more cheerful; never had he been seen to laugh so heartily; the Religious had not inherited the young man's *fits*. But he scarcely more than showed himself, and he left the following note of excuse for his quick departure:—"I should have been glad, my affection would have led me, to make a longer stay among you. I was unable to do so; and I feel in myself enough of grace and strength in my vocation to put away all desire, if Providence so destine it, of these sweet family pleasures; they are assuredly quite lawful, but a Companion of Jesus ought, like Him, to give them up, and go to seek the many souls that are strayed and lost."

At the conclusion of the Bordeaux Station, the Archbishop wished to give F. de Ravignan a public mark of his esteem, and prepared a nomination of him as Honorary Canon of the Cathedral. The Religious begged the prelate to spare him a dignity so little in conformity with his vocation. On this occasion the Rev. F. General wrote to him as follows:—"You have done very well in thanking his Grace, and begging him to accept your

refusal: we must avoid even the shadow of whatever approaches the nature of a dignity or pre-eminence in the hierarchy."

Hitherto there had been but one province of the Society in France, but the increase of our numbers rendered two necessary, which were established in 1836, under the names of Paris and Lyons. F. de Ravignan, by virtue of his birthplace, belonged to the southern province; he was therefore attached to it, although he was already destined for work in the metropolis.

On leaving Bordeaux, F. de Ravignan passed to the recently-founded residence at Toulouse. His stay in this town lasted but a few months. We find no particular worthy of mention belonging to this period except a passage written by him to the General:—"Our little community seems to me a thorough house of the Society in spirit and work. The place suits me wonderfully well; but by God's grace, every place would suit me well."

The southern province proceeded to open a new house at Bordeaux, of which F. de Ravignan was nominated the first Superior. Before leaving Toulouse, he wrote to his brother the following letter, with the request that it might be shown to his mother, who was away from home:—

"I trust that my good and honoured mother will see in this letter the expression of my gratitude and filial respect. My superiors, in placing me near her, have included comfort to her in their design; God grant that I may never fail to be her comfort, for this is the dearest wish of my heart. She must, however, be satisfied that at Bordeaux I shall lead not a family life, but, as elsewhere, the life of a Religious. I will certainly save her the trouble of coming to visit me; sometimes I will call upon her. I shall take my meals with my

brethren at home, never abroad ; once in the year I will dine with my mother, but no more. But she would not wish me to be otherwise than as I ought to be, that is, in the pursuance of my holy vows and of my rule, a total stranger to all worldly and family interests and business, never leaving home but for the duties of the ministry, or where civility absolutely requires it, or, it may be, to see her ; and she will, on these points, as faithfully respect before God my conscience and my religious independence as I ought myself to respect them. Again, I must repeat it in all frankness, for the benefit of you all, at Bordeaux I shall be a Religious, and nothing else. I positively demand to be left unembarrassed by anything external to my profession. I am bound to employ myself exclusively in the things of God and the salvation of souls, and this is quite enough. For this my soul needs profound peace ; we shall be united in prayer."

On Sept. 15, 1837, F. de Ravignan opened the new residence.

We shall say nothing of the difficulties and privations which inseparably accompany erections of this kind. The beginnings of the house of Bordeaux were very modest : in 1837 it reckoned only three Fathers and two Lay Brothers ; but the number of workmen gradually increased with the increase of means and of work to be done, and in 1842 F. de Ravignan left eleven Fathers and seven Lay Brothers.

The hand of the young Superior was firm, his heart large. He was equally careful in exacting study and discipline, being no more able to conceive a labourer without toil, than a Religious without observance of rule. He insisted on the need of seed-time before the harvest, of training before the fight, of providing resources before incurring

expense ; his maxim was, that a man knows as much as he learns, possesses as much as he acquires ; that sloth in preparation portends a barren ministry ; that, finally, a preacher ought for ten years to write his sermons and commit them to memory, under penalty of becoming commonplace and mediocre, even though gifted with talent, and sterile although he may seem to be sought after. The Rev. F. Roothaan expressed high approval of these views and this conduct : "Continue," he wrote, "to take care that the younger Fathers write their sermons and prepare them well."

When once duty had been performed, the Superior in his turn was ingenious in finding means of gratification for his subjects. Following the motherly instincts of the Society, and keeping within the bounds of religious simplicity, he was not content with allowing some relaxation between successive periods of exertion, he enjoined it. It is difficult to say what he would not have done to cheer the dejected and to cure the sick.

The Superior at Bordeaux had very little command of money. But he had read in the Rule that a Jesuit should love Poverty as a mother, and he thought that Poverty ought in return to love the religious as her children, and therefore, out of the little he had to relieve his brethren, he gave much. He was sometimes charged at this period with want of faithfulness in observing the virtue of poverty ; and the Provincial of Lyons having received information to this effect, sent him a letter of admonition. Scarcely had he received it, when, with heart full of anxiety and tears in his eyes, he called to him one of the Fathers of the house whom he judged best able to speak to him with freedom ; and he begged him to say in what respect he could have failed in observance of the Rule on this point. The Father assured him that he had never noticed

anything that could give rise to scruple. The Rev. F. General had also made some remarks to him ; his reply was full of humility. " As to poverty, my thoughts are full of your fatherly advice. My sincere desire is to be informed of it, should any one think that there is still anything wrong in our little house. Do not spare me the lessons which my heart loves. I know that on this point, as on every other, I am the first to go wrong."

Religious poverty ought never to be sordid, and may sometimes fitly be liberal. A revolution had just driven the Society from the Peninsula. The French Jesuits exerted themselves to return to their Spanish brethren the good offices they had received at their hands a few years before ; and at a time when they had scarcely a house of their own, they welcomed them with most hearty hospitality. The Bordeaux house, being the first to receive the exiles on their road, did more than any other. F. de Ravignan kept Brigue in his mind ; not content with merely sheltering his guests, he feasted them. Like a true brother, he shared with his brethren all that the house contained, money, linen, clothes, and with such kindness of manner that the strangers forgot their country, finding themselves still in their own family. The remembrance of how they were received at Bordeaux still survives in the Spanish Province, and the General wrote at the time a line of congratulation, beyond which no compliment was desired by F. de Ravignan. " Hospitality was shown to the Spanish exiles after the spirit of the Society."

Lastly, F. de Ravignan thought that the influence of a Superior ought to be chiefly exerted by way of example, and it may truly be said that he was far more exact than exacting. Everywhere, abroad as well as at home, he was scrupulously faithful to the Rules and to his exercises of piety.

The first moment he was able to begin saying his office he began it; on a journey, in a carriage, as soon as the time for meditation or examination of conscience came, he took out his watch, and did not put it by till the last moment of the exercise was passed. He reserved to himself the privilege that his task of labour should much exceed the tasks of others.

For five years the Superior of Bordeaux also preached the Conferences of Notre-Dame. He devoted to their preparation no time beyond the period of the summer heats, which is the slack time of work in large cities. He would then leave Bordeaux, as we shall explain hereafter. When this work was finished, he would return to his employments; and far from keeping himself back to enhance his reputation, he gave his services everywhere like a common workman. It may be that there was here some want of self-respect, and that he held his own reputation too cheap. His religious humility was his justification before God.

This true son of St Ignatius had a predilection for the more obscure employments, and never would he have undertaken anything more exalted, had not obedience imposed it on him to God's greater glory. He asked leave, as a favour, to give a public Retreat in the great Hospital of Bordeaux. After breakfast every morning the Fathers of the house accompanied him and went each to his appointed ward. The work was blessed: very few of the patients neglected to approach the Sacraments. F. de Ravignan had not experienced so much consolation since his missions in Switzerland.

Twice a year, during Advent and Lent, the government of the house was confided to the Minister, and the Superior devoted himself to preaching alone. If the only effect of this variety of employments had been to increase his fatigue,

he would never have thought of asking to be relieved from it ; but he feared that the division of his attention was injurious alike to his office and his ministry ; and with his unduly low opinion of his own powers, he thought himself absolutely unfit for government. Every letter he wrote to the General put this pretended insufficiency in a new point of view. "The fault is mine," he said : "I am unable to give up my affection and to train Ours ; I really think it would be a service to the house to give it another Superior." But the judgment of Rome was against him : "The time is not yet come to relieve you of your charge. You must continue, my good Father, to bend your shoulders under this cross."

We are glad to be able to record that it is in some degree owing to F. Lacordaire that Paris at length gained complete possession of F. de Ravignan. During the stay of the future Dominican at Rome, he exerted himself in conversation and otherwise to obtain this ; and in 1838, F. de Ravignan received the following lines from F. de Villefort, who had been his intimate friend from the days of his noviciate at Montrouge. "The Abbé Lacordaire has been in Rome for some days ; he came to see us, and spoke in high terms of the behaviour of the French Jesuits in his regard. He spoke to me of your last Conference of this year, at which he was present, and of the need that your stay in Paris should be longer, to gather in the fruit. Our Superiors also see the need of this, and I have great hopes that next year will see the fulfilment of the wishes which have been expressed by so many both within and outside the Society. The object of the Abbé Lacordaire's visit is to concert the means of re-establishing the Dominican Order in France ; he intends to enter it himself : I have hopes that this scheme will succeed, and when

I think of the great good that it would do, I desire it."

But Superiors do not always act as they would wish; often they are forced to yield to circumstances. F. de Ravignan had hoped to be relieved in 1840, on the expiration of that three years' term for which Superiors in the Society ordinarily hold their office; but his desire was not accomplished until 1842; at that time, although he continued to belong by right to the Province of Lyons, he came to reside in our house in Paris. At last, in 1847, an exchange was effected, and he was transferred to the Province in which his ministry lay.

The year 1837 saw the opening of the period of his oratory, which closed in 1846. These ten years of preaching in the foremost pulpit of the world form a great part of the glory of F. de Ravignan. We must be pardoned if we do not give to this period of his life more space and importance than to other portions. The orator is well known, and all the world still remembers his triumphs and his influence. Our aim is above all to chronicle his zeal and his virtues, and we wish chiefly to catch and to portray his likeness on the side of his interior moral life. We shall therefore seek the materials of our account rather in the letters of the religious himself than in his successful efforts and in the compliments he received from without; we shall, as far as may be, allow F. de Ravignan himself to tell us the story of his apostolate.





CHAPTER IX.

CONFERENCES AT NOTRE-DAME.

F. de Ravignan's Plan—His Correspondence with F. Roothaan—His Retreats—The Style of his Eloquence.



LACORDAIRE had opened the course of Conferences of Notre-Dame with a splendour which could not be surpassed. His success was immense, and he well deserved it by talents of the very first order. Orator, poet, and philosopher at once, the elevation of his thoughts, the splendour of his style, and the magic of his action were equally brilliant ; and his pen was scarcely less powerful than his spoken word. Truly he was a man sent by God to the nineteenth century, for nothing short of the countless lightning-flashes of his genius, its countless thunder-peals was needed in that headstrong and stormy generation to which were given eyes in order not to see, and ears that it might hear no more. Indisputably F. Lacordaire created the Conferences of Notre-Dame ; it is honour enough to have continued his work ; this was the part played by F. de Ravignan.

Men had been listening to the most magnificent

talent, they were now to see the grandest character. These two orators differ too widely to be compared, but are both too eminent for their names to clash when brought together. The younger also found means to supply a want in the work of his illustrious predecessor; the Retreat of Notre-Dame was a creation no less than the Conferences, and a crown was put on the work of F. Lacordaire by the work of F. de Ravignan.

The famous preacher had gone to Rome; his absence left the pulpit of Notre-Dame vacant, the great course suspended. Mgr. de Quélen, the Archbishop of Paris, had not the trouble of making a choice: the public voice designated F. de Ravignan, who was already well known by his station at the Church of St Thomas of Aquin: the Archbishop applied for him. Against this application F. de Ravignan at once protested, and for the first time in his life held back. He expressed his repugnance to the plan in the following letter to the General, dated from Toulouse in 1837:—

“One only thing fills my mind and troubles me, it is the character of this ministry. I see well that this position has been brought about by circumstances under the clear direction of Providence. But I say to myself, If I had had more humility, more of the spirit of Jesus Christ and of His saints, perhaps there would have been allotted me a more productive, less conspicuous, exercise of zeal. Pardon me, Very Reverend Father, it is a comfort to me to tell you of this thought. Oh that I could be nearer to you, to expose all my miseries and the infirmities of my soul! God long since withdrew me from the life of the world; and while I feel constantly happy in my vocation, my conscience nevertheless tells me all that my behaviour should have been. I am fortunate that my superiors with extreme indulgence keep and support me; my

gratitude and love for the Society on this account are always on the increase."

Obedience came in ; the General of the Society uttered the sacred word, Go. F. de Ravignan submitted ; and strengthened by his sacrifice of his will, full of confidence in God, he mounted the pulpit of Notre-Dame.

After setting forth his mode of preparation, we will collect some historical notes connected with his Conferences, and conclude by a rapid discussion of the style of eloquence which distinguished him.

When in the presence of his audience, F. de Ravignan relied no more upon himself than if he had done nothing ; but beforehand he laboured as though all depended upon him. Labour had the help of prayer, and of advice sought with eagerness and followed with humility ; here we have the triple secret of his eloquence.

The trouble and fatigue which the ungrateful labour of composition cost him were extraordinary ; he used to say that it formed the severest mortification of his life. But he was convinced that the priest who aspires to be an Apostle, must prepare in the sweat of his brow the bread of the Word, and that toil has merit to draw down a blessing upon the ministry. He wrote thus from Toulouse in 1837 to the Superior of the Paris house :—

"I am trying to gather some materials. I should like to reconcile the style which suits Notre-Dame with the truths that lead to practical faith. Pray for this blessing on a work which is your own. For my part I go often and heartily to pray before the body of St Thomas Aquinas at Saint-Sernin, to ask of him light, vigour, simplicity, usefulness. If you think proper you may tell our young Fathers, who are so full of zeal and courage for the pulpit, that no one can be more convinced than I am of the

necessity of obstinate toil. The Society and the glory of God look for this toil."

The greater part of F. de Ravignan's Conferences are marked as written at Canolle or at Vals. The former is a small country-house belonging to our house at Bordeaux; the latter is near Puy, and is a house for Scholastics and Novices, where a family and solitude were found united. Every year during summer, as we before remarked, he sought shelter in one or other of these places for several weeks of studious leisure. A Father, who was his usual companion at Canolle, thus describes the life led in this hermit's retreat:—"We two were there alone with one Lay Brother. Beyond our regular recreations and our spiritual exercises, the whole time was devoted to labour. Every Saturday we went to Confession at our Chapel at Bordeaux, and returned on the Sunday to Canolle. During the later years he drew up one Conference a week. He was exceedingly fond of this solitude. His conversation almost always turned on spiritual subjects."

However well employed were these times of retirement at Canolle and Vals, F. de Ravignan thought them insufficient. He was Superior; the care of his office, and a number of pressing pieces of business, took up the time which he deemed necessary for the preparation of his Conferences. God's work seemed to him to suffer, and he thought it his duty to lay his fears and his wishes before the General:—"I take the liberty," he said, "of opening my heart to you simply as a child to his Father, to lay before you an idea which for three months has been constantly recurring to me, with no trouble or repugnance, but with a difficulty, merely in my reason, of reconciling my twofold position. My life is rather busy, and it seems to me that I need several months together of quiet to

carry on the work of the Conferences. I am always happy in obedience; still I must say that the opinions of persons of weight often concur with my own reason in urging the need of this unbroken quiet work. My Conferences are feeble, and the time I can bestow on gathering and shaping my materials scarcely admits of my producing more than sketches. The will of God be done! I should be very unhappy were I to insist for the sake of gaining acceptance for my own judgment; and I have in reality experienced great consolation and visible assistance from God, while I thus fail in sufficient preparation. Excuse me if you notice some degree of eagerness and want of resignation. I conjure you with all my heart to attend to nothing in regard to the weakest of your children, except to your own unbiassed judgment as the solitary ruling motive. I am happy and content with every position which obedience assigns me. God gives me this grace sensibly in the depth of my soul."

But the fruit already gathered rebutted the fears so modestly expressed. F. General judged that F. de Ravignan was able to bear his double burden; and to this judgment the Religious put on himself a command to conform his own.

The Bordeaux Superior was like a child in asking and receiving advice. He occasionally sent a letter to Switzerland, to the revered F. Godinot, and the wise old man replied with a simplicity becoming alike to the master and to the pupil. "God be praised! I agree with you that you owe much to prayer; and I am convinced that prayer is what will carry the next station through, both in its preparation and when the time comes to give it. For my part I pray for you, and will always do so, my very dear Father."

But the oracle to which F. de Ravignan chiefly

listened spoke from Rome. The course of events forces me to set forth one of those exalted and holy friendships which religion alone knows. The French Jesuit, especially after his journey into Italy, found in his General more than a Father; both had drunk in the same spirit at the same source; F. Roothaan and F. de Ravignan became one in the Exercises of St Ignatius. I have been deeply moved in looking through the letters which, during a space of twenty years, they exchanged—letters worthy of a Father and a Son. Gladly would I publish, in the face of this our age, the secrets of this correspondence, so intimate and so religious; were not the world unable to understand anything of the things of God, it would from these letters understand what really is the spirit of the Society of Jesus.

First then, F. de Ravignan never failed each year to submit to F. Roothaan a detailed plan of his next Conferences, that he might thus obtain beforehand the sanction of a critic and the blessing of a Father. "May I venture," he wrote, "to crave your attention to these feeble outlines? While engaged on them, how often have I sighed for the return of the many wandering souls I shall have before my eyes! The work is difficult, the times peculiar, the minds of men sick with strange maladies, the instrument very unfit, and in want of aid. But the Lord is his confidence." As early as 1837 F. Roothaan replied to him: "The plan of your Conferences is well designed as a prelude to the Gospel for the present generation. But it will be necessary to speak to the heart, especially in the conclusion, so as to give a practical turn to discourses which seem addressed to the intellect."

F. de Ravignan was in the habit of confiding to him, as to a father, the secret of his pious despond-

ency, his holy melancholy, his apostolic schemes ; F. Roothaan would reassure his son, console and encourage him : “ I can readily believe,” he wrote, “ that you feel yourself attracted towards another style of preaching, and I am glad of it ; but we must often sacrifice the holiest tastes to God’s good pleasure. Have courage, dear Father, and great confidence in God, in God alone ; for the work you are about is God’s work : *Opus est Dei quod agitis.*”

Another time he wrote : “ How often, my dear Father, do I feel inclined to compassionate you ! I seem to see your heart pierced, crushed under your sorrow at not finding among so many hearts any entrance for that *needle* of the fear of God which alone can restore them to the road towards their last end. But I must not : this painful toil is not fruitless. If the labourer is denied the consolation of gathering an immediate crop, so much the richer will he be in the view of the Lord of the harvest.”

The recommendation to publish the Conferences dates as far back as 1838 :—“ I have great hopes,” wrote F. General, “ that they will be printed some day ; really it would be too much to go through all this labour merely to be heard speak once.” We may observe that the Father mentions only his hopes ; to the Son these hopes were a command. This is the true view of authority and obedience in religion.

All these letters of F. Roothaan are in French, for he was as familiar with most of the languages of Europe as with his own. But my admiration is given, not to the oratory of the one nor to the linguistic skill of the other, but to the religious spirit of both. For example, I have seldom met with anything more in the spirit of the Gospel than this letter of the Father to the Son : “ My affection

for you increases ever more and more, my dear Father, and what a blessing does the Lord give to you and your labours. At the same time may He grant you the gift, more precious than all your successes, the grace of not being content with yourself. That is the gift of gifts. If we succeed in being pleasing to God, and displeasing to ourselves, in toiling and suffering, in finding no repose but in the mercy of the Lord alone, how great, how very great a happiness would this be! Yes, my dear Father, be happy, you have reason so to be in the goodness and mercy of our Lord. I should be glad to talk a little longer with my dear F. de Ravignan; but”

The same correspondence supplies us with some historical details on the Conferences of Notre-Dame. Each year, the Religious, before asking advice for the future, gave his Superior a modest account of the work which had been already done. These reports are the more valuable to us because in them F. de Ravignan reveals to us his own heart, while telling us the story of his apostolate. The simplicity of style and even negligence sometimes observable, show not only the ease of familiarity but also how ceaselessly employed the man was who, hurried away by zeal and pressed on every side, found no time to speak of himself. After the first Lenten course in 1837, he wrote: “Accept, Very Rev. Father, the expression of the heartfelt and deep gratitude of the lowliest of your children. My poor feeble efforts certainly deserved no reward; and God is my witness that in my heart I looked for none but to accomplish His divine will. But He has granted me a very great reward; and what I value above all is to think that you have received some consolation. I raise my heart to God to bless Him for His kindness, and to humble myself in the thought of how good He is.

“ There have been some results at Notre-Dame, but as far as I have heard very few, considering the great number of hearers. I can myself speak to some happy cases of return to the faith among youths and men. The power of prayer has been great. I have been sensible of its effect, and of the grace which supported me. What in fact have I done myself, or what was I able to do ?

“ I was under some difficulties at starting. The influence of my predecessor's talent passed all belief, and made my position delicate and full of difficulty. I came forward with confidence and prayer, and God preserved throughout a good and favourable understanding between the large and brilliant assembly and the feeble instrument of His will. Thus I was able to speak out with the frankness and energy which faith inspires.”

No one could sustain a claim to be the Apostle of such an assembly as met in Notre-Dame unless he were first of all a philosopher. The subject chosen for the first year was accordingly a kind of Catholic philosophy of history, depicting the broad outlines of the struggle between truth and error. This idea is analogous to that which inspired the *City of God* of St Augustine: it was carried on in the station of 1838 by an explanation of fundamental doctrines, beginning with the Personality and Action of God, in opposition to the abstractions of the Pantheists, the ill-defined forms of Deism and Fatalism ; proceeding on to Liberty, the Immortality of the Soul and the End of Man, against Materialism. For all this it was necessary to go to first principles, to recall slumbering belief to life, and again to establish doctrines, which had been corrupted by numberless errors. Some portion of the hearers were from this time forward led to embrace the last practical conclusions, and

already F. de Ravignan had some consoling returns to the faith to report. At the end of the station of 1838 he wrote:—

“The attendance has been large and remarkable for the great number of distinguished persons, members of the present and former Ministries, Peers, Deputies, Academicians, well-known Protestants, foreigners of rank, and a troop of young men.

“There have been symptoms of approval, sometimes too freely manifested; conversions, a few, but not many. Moreover, no expressions of hostility, either in the newspapers or among the audience. God be praised!

“I have been forced to have some intercourse with a great many people, and some of them persons of note. M. de Châteaubriand paid me a visit: two interviews were arranged for me with M. de Lamartine; several physicians and men of science have sought to see me; some have been to Confession. How many great men there are ignorant of the faith, and sick in mind and heart.

“God has supported me. I have felt His grace, His help to our Society, and the benefit of the prayers offered for my work. I took care that none of the journals should employ short-hand writers, that my words might not be published in a distorted form.

“Tell me, Very Reverend Father, tell me your opinion of the whole, and the lessons I must learn from it. I should be very glad of this, and in fact need it.”

F. Roothaan wrote from Rome applauding these first results; but his joy was unbounded when the orator thought that the time had come when he might pronounce the name of Jesus Christ, and without ceasing to be a philosopher become a preacher of the Gospel. After the Conferences of

1839, F. de Ravignan, in spite of the press of work upon him, found time to write the following hasty letter :—

“God has again given me His support, and I should be most ungrateful did I not recognise in my past career a very special effect of His grace and intervention.

“With the help of this grace, I have been able to speak freely of the positive side of faith ; I have had the happiness of speaking constantly of our Lord, and of seeing that my words were received with approval.

“There have been some returns to God : the youths from the schools and the higher classes of the colleges seem to have been impressed for good.

“I pray God to bless this mission, if it be for His glory. All my strength within and without comes from the Society.

“M. Walckenaër, a man distinguished for his learning, an author and member of the Institute, came to see me last year ; but we did not arrive at a result. He has come again. Reparation has been made for forty years of forgetfulness of religion seen and known by all the world ; he made a public profession of faith in the presence of many other men of letters. Confession, Communion, and all were attended to. A mind raised far above the common has thus before my eyes come to know how lovely is the faith, and how sweet is our Lord.

“A physician of great attainments who has travelled much by sea and land, asked to see me ; grace moved him strongly ; he is now a fervent Christian ; he had wasted his whole youth far from God, in the silly dreams of the day.

“A wealthy Protestant, whose wife and all his family were Protestants, had heard me last year ;

this year grace moved him powerfully, but he was shackled. I thought it well to advise him to try to make a Confession on the spot; the idea made him almost shudder. However, he brought himself to resolve to do it. I taught him the sign of the Cross, &c. On finishing, he threw his arms round my neck, all in tears, and pressed me to his bosom almost beside himself. A more touching and thorough conversion can scarcely be conceived. All was settled and arranged secretly, without his wife's knowledge; but before making his abjuration, the husband thought right frankly to disclose to her what he had done, and what he was going to do. His wife approved of his conduct, and even rejoiced at it beyond all that we could have hoped. She has set herself to read, and I trust that she too will soon be converted.

"I have baptized an English lady, twenty-nine years of age, who had never been baptized, and whose return to the Catholic faith has also been very affecting.

"Another English gentleman of high rank (he has asked me not to mention his name) has often come to see me. He is convinced as to essentials, but he is checked by serious family difficulties. He is a chosen soul. We look forward to a sustained correspondence.

"I have received many consoling letters, not one that is anonymous or abusive. One I had, very neatly worded, in the name of the philosophy students of the Lycée-Saint-Louis at Paris. Almost all the heads and professors of the university sent their philosophy students to the Conferences. It seems that the result must be good. Twenty pupils of the great Normal School of the University of Paris have for one or two years been practising Christians, and they and some others

follow the Conferences with interest. They are favourably spoken of at the school.

"I might reckon a certain number of general Confessions, and of returns to God after a longer or shorter estrangement, by persons all of them holding a certain social position. M. de Chateaubriand publicly received the Easter Communion this year. He has several times visited me, and has spoken to me of his great act at Easter.

"But what crowds, what crowds have I left far from the truth, and who must have found an obstacle in my sins, my pride, and my weaknesses. I have never sufficiently confessed them yet; before God and you I humble myself for them. Reprove and punish me."

F. General answered: "When I look upon Jesus Christ and the Cross, I recognise my dear F. de Ravignan, the faithful scholar of St Ignatius and the Exercises. It is much, beyond doubt, to have been able to utter the adorable name of Jesus Christ without insult." However, F. Roothaan judged from the accounts which he received from France that more vigour and earnestness would have been proper in the practical conclusions. F. de Ravignan thus explained the reasons which had compelled him not to urge consequences too far:—

"VERY REVEREND FATHER,—I can at last tell you how much I was affected by the observations you have had the kindness to make, and how thankful I am for them. Still, truth obliges me to avow that what you recommend was present to my mind. My story, in all simplicity, is this: Bishops, Vicars-general, Priests of enlightenment, Fathers of our Society, men of piety and of high position, have been consulted, sometimes under circumstances which gave them full liberty to express their thoughts. They seem to me to agree that I

did enough in drawing a conclusion ; that to press it further would be to use force, to transgress the boundaries prescribed by the rules of my style and of decency.

“I may add that, in God’s sight, I think I feel myself not intended to do or say more for the great truths and the practical result ; that I seize my opportunities according to my own convenience ; that I should do violence to an interior direction, which I sincerely search for in prayer. I believe, too, that I am less deficient than appears in the published analyses, which I do not at all like, for they do not give the aim and sequence of my ideas.

“However, your Paternity will judge, and I will earnestly beg of God the grace to be more obedient.”

The audience at Notre-Dame was better understood at Paris than at Rome. It seemed, therefore, to the orator a duty to give F. General more and more information. We see him accordingly return to the question in the following letter, written at the end of the station of 1840, the results of which seemed to him not such as to lead him to advance more rapidly :—

“Have the Conferences of this year produced any fruit? I ask myself the question in God’s presence, and I am not very sure what to answer. I have heard it remarked vaguely that they have ; that the audience seemed more Christian ; that there were more Easter Communions of men. For my own private experience, I have had numerically fewer returns than in previous years. Two or three men of little position have boldly returned to Christian practice ; some others are shaken, but hang back. A French Protestant lady, with her young son, have both become Catholics. This is all that God has pleased to send me. I am deeply

humbled at the obstacles which I put to the good work, but without being ever discouraged.

"It is found, however, that results favourable to religion, and I think I may add to the Society also, are produced in Paris by this continued meeting together of men every year. The young people in the schools and in the world show for me esteem and confidence. I have, as it seems to me, the right to tell them the whole truth. However, I think I have remarked that when I have urged practical conclusions they do not follow me so completely."

Time was, in fact, necessary to allow souls to pass from conviction and sympathy to practice. Four years of Conferences slowly prepared the great result; the words of the orator gained more mastery over an audience which daily increased in numbers, in attention and in influence. At length, when he found himself master of his position, he gave free scope to the desires of his apostolic heart. He ventured to mention the word *Retreat*.

From the commencement of his ministry at Notre-Dame, F. de Ravignan had looked forward to the Retreat as the necessary crown of the Conferences. Prudence had enjoined him to wait, but in 1841 it seemed to him that God's hour was come. Still, in order to save the old work from sharing the risks of the new, he determined, at least on the first attempt, to separate the one from the other, and even to mark their distinction by a difference of place. Let us allow the man of God, in the fulness of his heart, to tell us of the fruit of his new apostolate.

"The Conferences were attended with the usual kindness and constancy. The idea of concluding by a Retreat had come into my mind nearly five years since, and almost at the very beginning of my Conferences at Notre-Dame. Hitherto I had

thought that the suitable time was not come. This year, about the middle of Lent, I sought and obtained the Archbishop's leave. It seemed prudent not to publish the matter beforehand, and to begin, too, with a small church. The Abbaye-aux-Bois was given me, which can hold with great crowding from 1000 to 1200 people. I was promised the large and handsome church of Saint-Eustache in case our numbers were greater. Saint-Sulpice was refused me.

"I gave notice of a Retreat for men during Holy Week, only on Palm Sunday at Notre-Dame before the Conference; an instruction every evening at eight o'clock till Holy Saturday inclusively. On the Monday evening, I went to the Abbaye-aux-Bois about half-past seven. I found an extraordinary crowd, and difficulty in getting places; and there was not a single woman. I had kept them all out. For nearly two hours the whole church had been full, and already a hundred people had gone away unable to get in. I wanted to cross the bottom of the church, but I could not get along. I was recognised, and with great earnestness, but without uproar, I was asked to adjourn elsewhere. I promised to do so. From the pulpit I was struck by this throng of men, almost all young, who filled the doorways, the altars—and no disturbance. After having warmly congratulated them, I appointed Saint-Eustache for the next day. Then I bade them all rise for prayer. They all rose like one man. We recited the *Veni Creator*, and the instruction followed on these words: *Venite seorsum et requiescite pusillum—Come aside, and rest a little*. I advised them all to remain for Benediction. All remained.

"Next day, Saint-Eustache was filled five hours before the service, and the following days they came even earlier.

“ My heart is full of gratitude to God. His help has been plain. I do not know that such a churchful of men was ever seen. The iron gates at the doors, the bases of the pillars, the rails, everything, was covered with people hanging on ; the nave and aisles filled and crowded beyond conception, and the deepest, most religious silence—not one disturbance, no police—3000 or 4000 men’s voices singing the *Miserere*, the *Stabat Mater*. The sight affected me deeply.

“ I at once adopted perfect apostolic freedom of language, and, without preface, began to speak of sin, of hell, of Confession, &c. I delivered my address, and appointed six hours every day which I would devote to men who might wish to see me. They have come in shoals. I have been hearing Confessions all the week, six or seven hours a-day, of men of all ages and positions in life—all very much behind hand. God has given me consolation. The prayers offered on all sides for this work have had a visible effect. There has been a marked movement in Paris. More Easter Communions everywhere. Our Fathers have received many more Confessions of men. I have not declined a single one, and I am still busy in finishing them.

“ A good many came to tell me of their difficulties, and I said to them, ‘ Well, believe me, there is but one way ; take your place there ; ’ and all, with a single exception, made their Confessions.

“ On Good Friday the Passion Sermon exhausted my strength ; the following day I had no voice left. I was unable to give the closing instruction of the Retreat on Holy Saturday. I wrote a scrap of a note to inform the Curé of Saint-Eustache, and he bethought him of reading it from the pulpit. All went off quietly ; the people waited for Benediction and went home.

“ A great many persons urged on me a General

Communion at the Cathedral. I too had thought of it, but, after taking advice, I thought it better to leave them with something to expect, and to put it off till the next year.

"I have received a certain number of letters, of the most affecting character, from persons who have returned to God, and who had applied to others. We here have all rejoiced together. The Archbishop is delighted.

"I hope that, by God's grace, we shall next year be able to take up this important work again, and to complete it.

"God has helped me visibly. I had only a few rough notes, and scarcely time to look at them. What I had to say on the disagreeable truths astonished myself. Your Paternity must help me to thank our Lord."

At this news F. Roothaan was overpowered with joy. But his humility soon made an appeal to that of his son in religion. "What a happiness!" he wrote.—"*Deo gratias* a thousand times. You are right, Father; God has helped you visibly, as you very well say. I am so fond of the words of St Peter, after the miraculous draught of fishes: '*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*' This was a new grace of God. *Ne dona Dei nos extollant!* Let not God's gifts puff us up." F. de Ravignan was not slow to reply:—"I do not deserve any of your kindness, any of God's grace; and the truth forces me to say, '*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*' I feel the buffet of Satan in a manner very different to the Apostle; that is, in spite of all my own personal weakness. I have no need to make an effort to be humble; I have never had a momentary thought of vain-glory; God was too clear before me. And then, what have I done? A great deal of evil."

The work seemed perfectly safe, so that the fol-

lowing year the Retreat fell into its natural place, and was joined for the future to the Conferences, as a necessary supplement.

At the end of the Lent of 1842, F. de Ravignan wrote :—"There never were more people at the Conferences ; at the Retreat, too, the gathering was considerable, both at midday and in the evening. The evening was for men, whose good behaviour and recollection, in spite of the immense crowd, were very edifying. God showed His goodness visibly ; an extraordinary impulse of grace made itself felt. There have been very many conversions of men of the world. My share has been eighty-seven general Confessions. Finally, we have seen carried out at Paris a General Communion for men alone in the Cathedral. This beautiful ceremony produced a deep impression on all, whether communicants or spectators. From the choir-rails, where I gave Communion, down to the organ, the whole nave was filled with men, all belonging to the upper or middle classes, or to schools."

The Apostle of Notre-Dame concluded this letter by repeating what he had said in 1841, that he easily avoided the temptation of vain-glory in a work where God's solitary action was so evident. In subsequent years he reported to his General successes equally great, with no less modesty :—"Thanks to prayer and the help of God, the Conferences of Notre-Dame and the Retreat have this year been again blessed. My gratitude is as deep as is the feeling of my own unworthiness. I venture to ask you to remember my miseries with pity in God's presence, and to beg of you, unworthy child as I am, to give me a part in your prayers, and your Holy Sacrifices."

At first F. de Ravignan undertook and conducted three simultaneous Retreats: a promiscuous one at seven o'clock in the morning; one for women at mid-

day; and at seven in the evening for men. But the task soon showed itself to be beyond man's strength; for the four following years the morning instruction was omitted. The double burden which he retained would still have exceeded the powers of most others. It is really not easy to conduct two Retreats at once; it requires great self-mastery to avoid being weakened by the division. Hearers so different require very different subjects.

And every day that he spoke, persons moving in the highest circles flocked to the vast building; the long lines of carriages covered the Place de Notre-Dame and all the adjoining streets, and we may be sure that on those days little store was set on the drive at Longchamp.

Throughout the period that the double Retreat lasted, F. de Ravignan felt that time would be lost in going and coming, every minute of which might be worth a soul, and therefore quitted his cell, and took up his abode on the scene of his apostolic labour. M. Surat, a canon and arch-priest of the Cathedral, with great kindness offered him a lodging, which he accepted with no less thankfulness. Once there, the man of God gave himself wholly up to the help of souls, and unintermittingly distributed the pardon which follows avowal of sin, the peace which goes along with grace.

I have no intention of describing the solemn ceremonies originated by F. de Ravignan, and which truly manifested the spirit of Christianity. Those who have been present know the effect when, at the opening of the evening instruction, the psalm of the penitent is chanted alternately by the voices of children, and by the voice of a whole people; when, on Good Friday, after a sermon on the Passion such as an Apostle can preach, the procession of holy relics winds through the close ranks, who bow as it passes; and especially when, on Easter morning, three thou-

sand men, with humility in their hearts and a holy confidence on their brows, come forward, in order, to the sanctuary where the chief pastor of the diocese, and the orator of Notre-Dame, are sharing the joy of distributing the Bread of Angels ; they will tell us that a scene more worthy of heaven is not seen on earth. The old church had witnessed many sacrilegious outrages, many royal solemnities ; it now witnessed what made amends for the insults it had suffered, and what recalled its most august celebrations. And who can tell the influence exercised upon the present generation by these thoroughly Catholic and almost national ceremonials. God alone, who values our works aright, knows the amount of merit due to the founder of the Retreats of Notre-Dame.

The moment the station was finished, the religious withdrew, and returned to his beloved cell, smiting his breast as an unprofitable servant, while the voice of the Archbishop expressed the feeling of the people when it proclaimed him to be the *Holy Priest*, the *Angel of the Gospel*, the *Apostle of Notre-Dame*, the *Modern Chrysostom*. From the depth of his retreat he heard, but did not listen to, the applause which earth gave. The only reward of his toil that he looked for was the opportunity of renewing that toil.

The Conferences and Retreats went on together with ever-increasing success, until 1846. Then sickness came to close the brilliant and toilsome career of the Apostle. He began to feel his strength decline even before his last station at the Cathedral ; and his own inclination may be said to have gone along with the counsels of Providence, to make him abandon the pulpit of Notre-Dame ; duty had led him to take up the work, and everything inclined him to resign it to other hands. His feelings at the end of his ten years' apostolate

deserve publication. On February 22, 1846, he thus laid his soul open to F. General :—

“ On again opening the course of Conferences at Notre-Dame, I must reckon much on assistance from Heaven, and on the help of your prayers. I feel more feeble, more ill, than ever. The matter I have prepared seems to me badly chosen and badly arranged. My own calm conviction is, that I must be worn out. I am not, I think, in low spirits ; but I do not feel in the humour. After all, I do not trouble myself about it, perhaps not as much as I ought ; and I am only too indifferent to success. Is it that my unworthiness has led God to withdraw His graces ? I have well deserved it.

“ However, will it not be time, after this year, to give up the pulpit of Notre-Dame ? may not ten years complete my course ? Do we not see a sign from Providence in my loss of taste for the work and ardour in it ? And, again, my stay in Paris is a weariness and weight to my soul ; I am continually incurring spiritual loss. I no longer have in Paris the required zeal, if I ever had ; I am really good for very little there. In the country I should be able, for some years yet, to devote myself to a more apostolic and more useful course of preaching. And then I am fifty years old. The wish of my heart has always been to give up preaching early. However, I resist my inclination for solitude and sedentary labour ; for it seems to me merely natural. In all these matters I put my trust in your Paternity with the confidence of a son. I shall embrace with joy whatever course obedience shall appoint.”

Submissive as this letter was, it nevertheless raised a scruple in the humble religious and zealous Apostle. He wrote again :—

“ I feel something like remorse at having pos-

sibly had any influence in securing my approaching deliverance. Have I not yielded to my sense of weakness? Have I been wanting in confidence, and have I made myself undeserving of help from on high by reason of my sins? Is it well for me to leave, or to try to leave, the pulpit, because the ministry is painful or perilous? These questions fill me with trouble and doubt. But I have no request to put to you on the matter. No, I have no wish, one way or the other. You must consider and judge. I shall await your orders, all your orders, with the deepest respect and most tender love."

F. General did justice to the humble request. His reply was:—"You have fairly earned a little repose. I think, therefore, that after the next station it will be right to surrender to the Archbishop the Cathedral pulpit. You can resume it, if offered, after a few years' interval. But just now, prudence counsels an interruption. I wish you to devote the short rest that will be allowed you to revising and publishing your Conferences."

However, the Archbishop had regard to the needs of the Church, and did not accept the resignation. The Religious informed his Superior of the Prelate's wish, and added: "After thinking over the matter in God's presence; after often praying and offering the Holy Sacrifice for this intention, I really believe that, in the interests of religion and of souls, in the interest of the Society, everything combines to recommend that I remain at Notre-Dame another year. Pardon me, Reverend Father, and bless me; and arrange, determine, as you will."

A promise had been made of Conferences in 1847; they had been already prepared, when the orator found his strength exhausted. This collapse showed the will of Heaven. The task was

accomplished ; the soldier of the Church was going to seek repose in suffering.

One word of censure, amidst so many approving voices, brought out the humility of the orator, and will not injure the effect of the present picture. F. de Ravignan has himself told us, that to prevent his words being published in a form distorted by the short-hand writers, he had forbidden the periodicals to print his Conferences. It was his right, and also, he believed, his duty. It was not long before the event justified his refusal. He allowed only an analysis in two religious journals, and even of these he disclaimed the responsibility. A country canon, with more zeal perhaps than sense, thought he discovered in the summary the germ of every heresy, and the first principles of rationalism, and took on himself the duty of alarming the public. Humility defends itself in its own way, and F. de Ravignan used no other mode : he answered violence by meekness. He thus addressed the objector :

“ If I have kept silence with respect to the summaries of my Conferences ; if I have felt, and still feel, a real repugnance to entering on the matter with you, believe me, the cause is not any soreness nor self-love. I do as full justice as any one to your conscientious endeavours, and the zeal which leads you to fight in defence of sound doctrine.

“ But since God’s will has assigned me the work of the Conferences of Notre-Dame, allow me to tell you the invariable course I have resolved on, and which I shall continue to follow.

“ Whatever I can do to avoid summaries in newspapers, I will do. In spite of all my efforts, I have not hitherto been able to succeed. As I speak in the presence of the Archbishop of Paris, and often of other Bishops, of the Vicars-general, the Chapter, and many well-known priests, and other competent

judges, I think that my teaching has all the publicity, all the sanction, that could be wished. I confess I very much dislike this modern practice of publishing in the newspapers instructions given from the pulpit. I have constantly and sincerely sought to obtain from the Archbishop, from learned theologians, from my superiors, and my most experienced fellow-workers, their criticisms, their advice, their judgment upon my doctrine. Truth forces me to say, that for a space of six years past, not a single remark has been made to me on the subject.

"I attach no importance to what the newspapers put in my mouth: I give no approval to their summaries; they contain neither my thoughts nor my words. They are often very full of mistake, very far from accurate, erroneous both in doctrine and in language. I leave them alone. I hold myself answerable only for what I said in the pulpit. I do not even read these summaries; and my wish is, that out of Paris every one would look at them in the same light that I do.

"I am in no degree offended at what you have thought it your duty to write to me, on my *strange statements, my false and dangerous maxims, . . . which are enough to make the hearer stop his ears, and the reader cover his eyes, and shed bitter tears, . . . these errors, so opposed to the Holy Scriptures and to the constant teaching of the Church.* In the expressions you use in your letter, I see nothing but the charity and zeal of a fellow-labourer; I thank you for them from the bottom of my heart."

This humility was of avail to change the position of the parties. The critic had the good faith to publish this letter of complete justification, and added an apology of his own. His words are: "This answer from the celebrated preacher of the Conferences of Notre-Dame, while it fills me with

confusion, is, I think, the loudest encomium that can be passed on his humility and charity."

Having finished this rapid sketch, we must now try to discover in the orator himself the elements of which the triumphs of his ten years' course were made up. The Conferences of F. de Ravignan were delivered long ago; they may be read now; teachers of the art of eloquence analyse and discuss them—it is their business. It is enough for us to give the character of style adopted by the evangelic labourer. Our work is no literary exercise, no discussion on oratorical art, but only the story of the career of a great and holy Apostle.

All agree that F. de Ravignan was a true orator, but this is not saying that he excelled in every respect. A want was felt in him not of more argument, but of more imagination, more colour and more vividness of style.

He was eminent in his own style; let us not expect more. When an artist is thus eminent, defects are mere accidents concealed by the mass of excellence, shadows which help to bring better out the main features.

When we read, we may find some lack of poetry and literature; but no one thought of this when listening to his original and powerful words; he chose the word which expressed his thought, spoke to work conversion, and not to give pleasure, with no thought of the memory of himself surviving save in the mind of God. Philosopher he was, and thinker, but he was not what is called creative; endowed with an eminently positive mind, he preferred ordinary practical teaching to all inventions of his own and curious theories. The character and secret of his form of discourse must be sought, not only in his natural temper, but in his religious convictions.

The personal character of F. de Ravignan was

the main point of his eloquence; I will express it in two words: it was Virtue preaching Truth. This would not perhaps be enough in a university, but it is enough in a church. A man has great power of convincing when it is felt that he believes, and of persuading when it is seen that he practises.

Moreover, F. de Ravignan had some high qualities of great importance in an orator. I will first mention his perfect confidence, a sort of impassibility, which sprang less from reliance on his own talents than from forgetfulness of himself and contempt for reputation. Add to this a deep feeling that he had a mission from God, the fullest conviction of the truth of his doctrine, and the result will be an authority in speaking carried to the greatest possible height. Authority in speaking, this was the distinctive feature, and we may say badge, of F. de Ravignan. It is not the sparkling of wit that can subdue consciences and gain mastery over them; much more is needed. It is not the splendour of genius—there is something far better: this empire is reserved for strength of character. Had he had the whole world assembled before his pulpit, he would have said neither more nor less, having no thought but of souls, and raising no thought but of God. This true mastery in the orator gave incomparable majesty to his statements, irresistible power to his logic; he was able to assert, and here lay his triumph.

F. de Ravignan had also much of the animation of oratory, and that depth and strength of passion which produce eloquence. At first there was noticed in him a certain cadence and slowness of utterance, with a marked and slightly southern accent. He shot forth each word like an arrow, and his whole soul seemed to start and dash forward with it. His style too was a little rough and wanting in polish,

but he gained by this in nervousness and point ; he was abrupt and striking. Finally, there was in his discourse a constant advance ; it began its progress from the very opening, and hastened forward to the peroration. He did not captivate, but the majesty of his word mastered souls, which his logic shook, and conviction led captive. The immense body of hearers, comprising all the principal persons of social political and literary life in Paris, conducted themselves with a gravity suitable to the sanctity of the building and the dignity of the speaker ; yet occasionally they were moved and in a manner carried away by unexpected flashes.

One day F. de Ravignan had been painting in grand outline the wilful misery of the unbeliever, his doubts and self-contradiction, his melancholy and fear, his repining and despair ; the picture was striking for its truth, and was drawn with an energy passing belief ; the hearers were paralysed. Suddenly want of breath compelled the orator to stop ; he folded his arms on his breast, and with an inimitable intonation let fall the words, *And we—we are believers.* This unlooked-for contrast was caught up at once : a movement ran through the hearers, restraint was no longer maintained, applause broke forth. But the humility of the priest took alarm, reverence made him indignant. With glowing countenance, and arm raised in air, he seemed as if he would throw himself among his hearers. *Silence !* he exclaimed, and his voice overpowered the sound, while his action stopped all expression of feeling. He could not bear that man should receive applause in the immediate presence of God.

As to oratorical action, which is almost everything in eloquence, that of F. de Ravignan was excellent, because it was true. In it more than elsewhere he displayed his real self ; his style of course expressed his thoughts, but in his action his

character came forth. As a whole, it gave the idea of greatness, prudence, and vigour. He had no need now as formerly to seek a distinguished bearing; he had it without the wish, without a thought. His attitude was at once noble and modest; his forehead high, and as it seemed, glowing; his eye bright, with sometimes a heavenly look; his countenance expressive, his gestures rapid and natural, but more frequently restrained than uncontrolled.

The most impressive instant in his sermons was perhaps when he was first seen in the pulpit. From a humble prostration before God he rose before men with dignity, and looking on himself as made a spectacle to heaven and to earth, he remained a long time motionless, his eyes cast down, his whole appearance full of recollection; when at length the auditors were settled, full of the impression produced by this silent exordium, he began that famous Sign of the Cross, which belonged to him alone; he threw into it some degree of pomp and stateliness. He could not endure that others should curtail the Christian sign. "What!" he would say, "is the Cross a plaything, a scarecrow? you all seem to want to play with it, or else to be rid of it. It should not be so; put away all fear and shame. A Christian should be proud to display his standard, and for the honour of Christ, the sign of the Cross should not be used without some formality."

Every person present was struck by this preparation for a discourse, a preparation which so exactly suited F. de Ravignan. Many attended the church quite as much in order to look on him as to hear him. A Protestant minister who witnessed this solemn opening, this mute eloquence, exclaimed, "He has preached without speaking a word, and the sermon is ended before

being begun!" It was pointedly said at the time, "When F. de Ravignan shows himself in the pulpit, no one can tell whether he has just ascended from earth or come down from heaven!"

However, the orator spoke very disparagingly of his own achievements, nor did he esteem them better than he said. He would often say, "All this is of no importance, of no use; it is fit only for the fire." When he received the order to preserve his Conferences, and to revise them, he obeyed with a repugnance that duty alone could overcome; and he kept repeating to the last, "I have done all I could, and I am content with having done so; after all I owe the world nothing, and I ask nothing of it." It may in fact be true that the mere reader of his Conferences will not find in them all that was found on the original delivery. I am myself inclined to exclaim, Ah, this is only the shadow of the mighty orator! His great soul is not here!

Eminent as F. de Ravignan was in his Conferences, he was, we may say, alone in the excellence of his Retreats. In these his power truly lay. On this subject I will first call attention to his wonderful fertility. Fertility does not consist exactly in the multitude of discourses or works; where the subjects vary, it is not surprising if an author does not repeat himself; fertility consists in variety and richness on a single subject. Now F. de Ravignan seemed ever new, although his theme remained the same. In all his countless retreats at Notre-Dame and elsewhere, he gave the Exercises, nothing but the Exercises of St Ignatius; he made it a point of duty to follow the plan of the Exercises, for their order is that of reason and of faith at once, the logic alike of nature and of grace; to speak of the great truths they contain, which belong to the present time no less than they be-

longed to the past ; to recommend their methods, to quote their maxims, and to follow even their wording, insomuch that at last F. de Ravignan's style was sensibly influenced by that of St Ignatius. Nevertheless his Retreats always had a novel effect, even when he had given several to the same persons. He merely took up the old truth on a new side ; from whatever point he approached his subject, his search at once led him to the infinite and the eternal, just as when we reach the sea, by whatever road we have come, we find ourselves face to face with immensity.

The first character I have noticed is rather speculative, and belongs chiefly to the intellect ; another may be added which is more practical, and depends more upon tact ; skill in form comes next to fertility of matter. He affords a good example of what is meant by the man of a single book. F. de Ravignan was masterly in the use of the Exercises, as a workman in employing his tool ; without changing them he adapted them to all needs. The apostolic art is still, as in the days of St Paul, to become all to all, to suit one's-self to the needs of souls, that thus they may be fashioned for God ; this is the whole art of wielding the Exercises. The Jesuit accordingly had no storehouse but his small book, but he knew, when occasion arose, how to find in it all his provisions and weapons of every kind. When he was giving two or even three Retreats at once at Notre-Dame, each one was complete, and at the same time peculiar.

F. de Ravignan did not in his Retreats follow the same method of preparation and delivery as in his Conferences. Of course he was not without the remote preparation of deep conviction, acquired by the habitual use of meditation, but that was all ; in fact he had no time for more. Before the Retreat began, he was satisfied with sketching its plan,

fixing the subjects of each instruction, and marking down the divisions of the subjects. Immediately before the hour appointed for the Exercise, often merely when crossing from his house to the church, he gave a moment to recollection and prayer, and allowed his soul to come under the influence of his subject and the effect of grace ; then he gave way to the promptings of his heart and to divine inspiration.

The Retreat was therefore a true improvisation ; and assuming that the preacher possessed learning and experience, F. de Ravignan preferred this method in Retreats, although in sermons he would not admit it. "Give yourselves full scope," he would say, "the more you give way, the more you will draw others with you ; if you yourself have motion you will set the rest on the swing." The drawbacks to this plan scarcely existed in his case, carelessness, wandering, inequality ; but he secured all its advantages, reality, natural feeling, life. Every point took its proper place, in due order and progression ; every word came at the right time, correct and elevated, as though from careful selection ; he never strayed from his path, nor exceeded his time.

What is improvised comes into existence to be listened to, not to be read ; no one can or ought to speak as he would write ; the language of an author is not that of an orator, and above all not that of a missionary. Had F. de Ravignan spoken better than he did, his success would have been smaller. Might I venture to express my own opinion, I would say that when he alleged that he could not write, he went too far ; but it really does seem that his spoken language was superior to his writings.

Thus F. de Ravignan conducted his Retreats in the manner of a missionary, but with the constant observance of a distinction which suited himself

and his hearers alike. In them his heart spoke more than his intellect. Yet although the orator addressed the passions, he never failed to establish the principle before deducing the consequences ; after explaining the doctrine, he passed at once to direct address, inveighing against his hearers, putting them questions, pressing them ruthlessly, threatening and terrifying ; then still more warmly encouraging them and beseeching them with clasped hands and tearful eyes. While vehement beyond expression, be it well remembered, he never was indignant, save against sin ; he was ever full of compassion, above all towards sinners.

Let us conclude : Retreats became more and more F. de Ravignan's proper work in the ministry. We shall witness the failure of his strength of body, but not any diminution of his vigour of soul ; and when his voice no longer had the power needed in the pulpit, his heart was still on fire in the Exercises ; and like a soldier who falls with his arms in his hands, the close of his last Retreat preceded by but a little the close of his life.





CHAPTER X.

ADVENT STATIONS AND DETACHED SERMONS.

F. de Ravignan takes his Last Vows at Lyons—Pilgrimage to Loyola—Mission to Rome—Funeral Sermon on Mgr. de Quélen—Discourse in Presence of Queen Marie-Amélie—Conversions of Russian Schismatics.



URING the period when F. de Ravignan was engaged in giving the Conferences at Notre-Dame, the chief cities of France sought his services for the Advent stations. We find him in 1837 at Lyons, in 1838 at Bordeaux, in 1839 at Grenoble, in 1840 again at Bordeaux, in 1841 at Rome, in 1842 at Besançon, in 1843 at Rouen, in 1844 at Toulouse, in 1845 at Metz : Marseilles secured him for 1846, and in the following years he visited successively Strasburg, Dijon, Poitiers, Angers, Nantes. He was stopped by sickness when on the road to Marseilles ; and thus the great series of stations came to an end, its place being supplied, as we shall see hereafter, by a new kind of apostolic ministry. To this list should be added another containing the single sermons and Retreats of which we shall speak. In fact, the life of F. de Ravignan presents no void, no period of repose.

We must try to gather together some of the

special characters which belong to these different works. What strikes us before all the rest is the humility, the brevity of the accounts which the religious gave of his labours. Generally a few words are found sufficient. "The station was not well attended. The Advent was well attended ; it had some good results. The station was very well attended ; no particular fruit, to my shame I add." Yet many souls still feel happy in preserving the memory of these discourses, which were to them the occasion of returning to the faith, or to the practice of the duties of religion ; and the judgment of God on these labours has been, we doubt not, more favourable than that of the Apostle himself.

After the Lyons station of 1837, F. de Ravignan remained in that city, preparing himself in retreat for taking his last vows. He wrote on the subject to F. General :—"F. Provincial has informed me of the decision you have come to, of admitting me to the Profession, and even before the time ; I have no way deserved either favour. I will strive to make myself less unworthy of them by uniting myself more closely to the spirit of our Blessed Father, which is indeed my desire. Blessed be God, Who has received me into the Society and keeps me there ; I have a lively and heartfelt sense of the greatness of this happiness, and I thank the Lord for it every day of my life." On February 2, 1838, the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, in the presence of F. Renault, the Provincial of Lyons, he made the solemn profession of four vows, and thus, after fourteen years, he happily became, in the fullest sense, a Jesuit.

It was not long before Providence provided the young Professed Father with a most welcome means of satisfying his love for the Society, and his son-like personal attachment to St Ignatius.

Previous to the station at Grenoble, in November 1839, he was preaching a Novena at Bayonne, when he obtained leave from the Provincial to cross the Spanish frontier to make a pilgrimage to Loyola.

At some leagues' distance from the sea and from the Pyrenees, in the midst of a rude district, encircled on all sides by mountains, there still stands the castle where St Ignatius was born, and where afterwards he commenced a new life by the heroic resolve which he conceived on the sick-bed. Extensive buildings have gathered round the place, and have been embellished by the munificence of the kings of Spain, but the old house is to the Society a family property. Often has the Society been deprived of it, but it has always been restored by God; and even in our own time illustrious visitors have honoured by their presence this blessed abode, the very pavement of which was kissed with the deepest respect by St Francis Borgia, once Duke of Gandia and Viceroy of Catalonia.

F. de Ravignan came here to seek strength for his apostolic labours: "I have had, if I mistake not," he wrote, "some feeling of the virtues which are proper to the Society, and which are so necessary to me in my ministrations. But how far I am from practising them! I was glad to visit this holy place. I have asked for humility of heart: how wide is the gulf between desiring this virtue and having it!" In these lines he does not tell us everything. The death of the humble religious made known what one only of his Brethren, his Confessor at the time, learnt from his own mouth. In this sanctuary, hallowed already by so many marvels of grace, close and supernatural communing took place between the soul of St Ignatius and that of F. de Ravignan. We know not what was the nature of these wonderful communications;

but we know that when F. de Ravignan left Loyola, he had a foreknowledge of the toils and trials which France had in store for him on his return from his pilgrimage. This was merely the prelude to other supernatural intercourse, which it will be our duty to record in a future page, and which was not wanting for the consolation of the worthy son of St Ignatius even in the hour of death.

The letters which passed between F. Roothaan and F. de Ravignan had already made them to know each other thoroughly, but they had never met. The desire of meeting was equal in the heart of each; and in 1840, the French Jesuit for a moment hoped that he had found an opportunity in a scheme for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. We find the following passage in one of his letters of this date to the General:—"A design was conceived some time since by M. Auguste de Perceval, a man of great piety, and a friend of mine from childhood, of making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which is now rendered so easy and short by the steamboats. He has been talking it over with me for two years, wishes for the company of some friend of his, a priest, proposes to bear all the expense, and to take Rome on his way. He will take with him one servant only. He is very urgent: I content myself with writing to let you know his request." The humble and obedient religious took care to remark that he did not make known any wish of his own, for he had none, but only his friend's proposal; and that for himself, he asked one thing only, to be reproved if he had done wrong. F. General answered: "Be assured that this proposal is no small temptation for me too, so glad should I be to see you. However, I dare not as yet say either Yes or No." The pilgrimage to Jerusalem was destined to remain for ever a mere project.

But in the following year Providence provided for the two friends another opportunity of meeting and conversing freely.

In the year 1841 the Preacher of Notre-Dame was deputed by the Lyons Province to attend the Congregation of *Procurators*, which meets at Rome every three years, in the presence of the General, for the purpose of informing him concerning the needs of the Society, and of preserving its members in perfect union of spirit and heart. Scarcely was the business of the Congregation over when the deputies hastened to return to their Provinces, but F. de Ravignan remained behind, to give the Advent station in the church of St Louis of the French, and a retreat in the chapel of the *Caravita*. His account of all this is singularly modest. "Rome always consoles and affects me; its holy memories do me good. The attendance here in Advent is very good. A large number of French families are spending the winter in Rome. The ambassador, M. de Latour-Maubourg, had the kindness to send one of his carriages for me at the Gesù, and to carry me back from Saint-Louis after the sermon." Scarcely had he returned to France, when F. Roothaan wrote:—"I must tell you again, my dear Father, how glad I was to see you, to learn to know you, to hear your voice, and to witness the good which the Lord is pleased to work by your ministry. *Ever go forward!* I do not know whether you have heard of a society of pious ladies which the Princess Borghese has formed, and who wear as a memento a ring engraved with these words taken from your *Caravita* retreat: It is a very good and very useful memorial."

In the passage from Rome to Marseilles, the ship was driven by a storm near the coast of Corsica, and obliged to seek shelter there. F. de Ravignan suffered dreadfully; from the first mo-

ment of setting foot on shipboard, even in the calmest weather, he was always seized with seasickness, and as long as the passage lasted his torments seemed little short of a death-struggle. He had scarcely landed when the Bishop of Ajaccio heard of his having come, and invited him to ascend the Cathedral pulpit. Notwithstanding his recent sufferings, he accepted the offer without hesitation. He thought that an apostolic man ought never to let slip a single opportunity of preaching the Gospel. Under all circumstances, in a cathedral or in a poor village church, in a convent or in a college, everything suited him ; he was ready for everything. This caused his life to be an almost ceaseless mission, and the sermons he preached would enable us to trace his journeys.

After the station at Besançon in 1842, his Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop expressed in the highest terms his admiration for F. de Ravignan : " I have just had his company," he said, " for forty days ; I have watched him very closely, and I have yet to learn in what point he is not perfect."

In this year he far exceeded the ordinary measure of his apostolic labour ; for over and above the Advent at Besançon and the Lent at Paris, he undertook the three Retreats during Holy Week, and three months of Conferences at Saint-Séverin.

During the Advent of 1843, F. de Ravignan had this good news to send to his Superior : " In spite of the resistance of the ladies, who were obstinately bent on keeping their chairs, we succeeded in having possession of the nave of the Cathedral secured for men alone. They showed a good deal of earnestness. The Prefect, the General, the First President, the *Procureur-Général*, were there regularly. But—but—if the man of God is not there !" The fruit gathered showed that the man of God

was there, and at work : F. de Ravignan was the only one who doubted it.

A good many incomplete works and single sermons, in every part of France, belong to this same period. Though the name of Jesuit was at the time very unpopular, yet F. de Ravignan had gained among the higher classes an immense reputation, which was justified by his talents, and, above all, by his virtue. Often competition arose for the services which he never refused. Thus I have counted on an average for each winter no less than ten sermons in the pulpits of Paris alone for charitable objects, or on other important occasions. It would be tedious to name them all. Three only seem to call for particular mention in this history.

In 1840 the funeral sermon on Mgr. de Quélen was entrusted to F. de Ravignan, in spite of his remonstrances. He was certainly not wanting in veneration for the memory of this unjustly persecuted bishop ; but the Jesuits perceived clearly that an excuse only was wanting for the commencement of a persecution of which they would be the objects ; and thus the preacher of Notre-Dame felt how full of danger would be a public panegyric on the prelate. F. General had no answer to his objections but this : “ I sympathise with you in the difficult task you have been forced to accept.”

A step taken by the Government increased still more the delicacy and difficulty of his position. M. Teste, the Minister of Worship and Keeper of the Seals, required that the funeral sermon should be in the first instance submitted to a censorship. It no doubt cost the Metropolitan Chapter of Paris a great deal to subject itself to this law before imposing it on the orator. The annoying message was delivered to F. de Ravignan through his Superior, F. Guidée ; he contented himself with answering, “ I confess, Reverend Father, that if I

were the Abbé de Ravignan, I should never submit to the Minister's conditions, and I should at once send my resignation to the Vicars Capitular; but F. de Ravignan will do all that you desire."

The discourse bore marks of his false position; there is nothing in it to blame, but something is missing, and the favourable and unfavourable critic are equally at a loss. The humble religious told no one of the condition which had been put upon him; and instead of setting down the weakness of his composition to the score of the restraint under which he wrote, he found no cause for it but his own want of talent. "Why," he said, cheerfully, "Bossuet had genius, and I have not any: that is all the difference." The *Journal des Débats*, a newspaper not in the habit of sparing Jesuits, contained some very severe criticism on this funeral discourse. It was soon brought to the notice of F. de Ravignan, who always seemed eager to receive such marks of good nature. At the next recreation, just as if he was no way concerned in the matter, he brought this damning sentence to his brethren, and calmly remarked, "See, here is what seems to me an excellent piece of criticism; I should recommend you to read it." Is the noblest work of genius of as much value in God's eyes as an act of humility?

It was impossible that the orator should succeed in the funeral address on Mgr. de Quélen, for he was not at liberty to allow his own heart to speak with freedom; but whenever his soul was allowed to flow forth without restraint, success never failed him. The noblest triumphs of F. de Ravignan's art as an orator and as an Apostle were obtained in charity sermons. His name, his words, were sure to attract a large attendance, and to move them to liberality. Nothing could resist his vehemence, and the unction and dignity of his language, when

he was pleading the cause of poverty or of misfortune.

Once he preached at Saint-Roch on behalf of the Maria Theresa Institution, which Mme. de Chateaubriand had founded, for the relief of the clergy in sickness. I have now before me the conclusion of this discourse. When I look on these lines, written by F. de Ravignan on the back of a letter, I know not whether more admiration is due to the great orator, or to the priest who, having chosen poverty as his own lot, pleads on behalf of his brethren in the priesthood and his fellows in poverty.

"Now that I have spoken to you of God made Man for love of you, have I not already spoken to you of those whom He has appointed to come after Him to continue His divine ministry, and to extend it to all men? For them I humbly implore your assistance; nor need I blush to avow before you the glorious penury of my brethren in the priesthood.

"I must not fear to say it, here prayers of gratitude are addressed to God by the noble victims of most affecting misfortune, by hearts which had seemed destined by God to succour misery, not to taste it. Every day are hands raised to Heaven from before the altar in gratitude for your bounty, hands long accustomed to distribute the alms which you offered with a mingled feeling of respect for the minister of your charity and a humble hope of future recompense."

The Queen, Marie-Amélie, was among the hearers of these beautiful and touching words; in her exile at Claremont she still spoke of them to a faithful friend. "Up to that time," she said, "I had thought F. de Ravignan the greatest of our orators; but on that day my respect for him was doubled."

On another occasion, the Jesuit orator produced

a yet deeper impression on the heart of this princess. In the very year when the Government gave up our Society to the persecution of the newspapers and of the public lectures, in March 1843, he again preached before the Queen at Saint-Roch, on behalf of the unhappy victims of the earthquake at Guadaloupe. His religious profession debarred him from all concern with politics, but he was induced to allude in this discourse to another recent calamity—the tragic death of the Duke of Orleans,—and to offer some consolation for this great sorrow to the Christian mother, whose first exclamation had been, “Oh, tell me at least that he is in heaven!”

The Queen was not satisfied with sending her thanks to the eloquent and saintly preacher—they are her own words—through the Archbishop; one of her ladies wrote thus to F. de Ravignan: “Tell me, you who say everything so well—tell me whether there is room for misgiving, or whether we ought not rather to hope all things from God’s mercy? If you have any favourable hope to impart to this sorrowing heart, make me your messenger. You have already done her so much good!”

The humble and pious answer sent by F. de Ravignan will edify our readers no less than it consoled the royal mother:

“It is but a few moments since I received the letter which you did me the honour to write. Your words have affected me deeply; in fulfilling my duty, in giving feeble expression to the feelings of my soul, I had done nothing to deserve so great kindness.

“A mother’s sorrow is the noblest of all sorrows, and the most to be respected; we may then believe it to have most power over the Heart of God. We cannot, it is true, penetrate the secrets of His mercy;

we are not permitted to know what passes in the last moments of a cruel and mysterious agony, nor can we speak of it with certainty; but we are Christians living under the law of Hope, no less than of Faith and Love, and in the very depth of grief we must never cease to raise ourselves to the thought of the boundless goodness of our Saviour. In this world, while a spark of life remains, there is no wall, no impassable barrier, between grace and the soul. We must then always retain hope—always address our entreaties to the Lord with humility and perseverance. No man can tell what effect they may not have. Great saints and great doctors have gone very far in speaking of this mighty power of prayer for beloved souls, whatever may have been their end. A day will come when we shall know these wondrous marvels of God's mercy: we must never cease from begging for it with the fullest confidence.

"I am always fond of setting God before men as the tenderest, the most compassionate of mothers; all that she who so well deserves to be called a mother has so much longed for in her son's last hour—all this did God long for, yet more ardently. To His all-powerful love I resign all concern.

"I shall return humble thanks to our Lord that my poor words were the occasion of some comfort being felt in the greatest of sorrows."

F. de Ravignan was fond of speaking of the mysteries of grace which he believed to be wrought at the moment of death; and his impression seems to have been that a large number of sinners are converted in their last moments, and breathe out their soul reconciled with God.

This was not the end of the intercourse between the royal mother and her pious comforter: and I regard it as a duty to record in this place one of these, perhaps little looked-for, connexions which

Christian charity is able to bring about between hearts which might have seemed destined never to understand each other. On March 30, 1843, just as the Government of Louis Philippe was on the point of beginning its attack upon us, F. de Ravignan wrote to F. Roothaan:

"M. Trognon has just left me—he who had the honour of visiting you in Rome. The Queen had sent him to me on a pious errand. She had learned from the family of La Ferronnays that your Paternity has every week the disposal of the intention of one Mass said by each priest of the Society. The subject of her eldest son's salvation is ever in her mind—he who was taken away so suddenly; and she has conceived a great desire of begging of you the greatest possible favour—her own words—to apply to the soul of her son the intentions of all our Fathers' Masses which are at your disposal, and this for once only.

"I thought, Very Reverend Father, that I might say to M. Trognon, in answer to the Queen's message, that I had no doubt her wish would be satisfied, and that I would write to you about it. The Queen seems to me to be really interested in our cause; often she has had letters written to me, both of compliment and on confidential matters; she asked for a copy of the Guadaloupe sermon; she is just now busy in procuring for us six free passages on the steamers to Alexandria, for our Fathers who are going to Madura. I will venture to hope that your Paternity will grant the wish of this poor mother in her Christian sorrow."

We have now before us another letter, dated from the Tuileries, April 6, 1843, and addressed to the Reverend Father General of the Society of Jesus; in spite of its resemblance with that just cited, it has an historic interest, justifying its insertion:—

“VERY REVEREND FATHER,—Our noble and pious Queen, with mind ever full of anxiety as to the fate of her beloved son, whom she lost under such dreadful circumstances, never ceases from begging prayers for him. She has been told that once a week all the priests of the Society of Jesus, in offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, are bound to unite their intention with that of their Father-General, and at once the thought occurred to her of procuring, if possible, the consent of your charity, that so many good prayers should move together to the throne of God’s mercy on behalf of the soul of her poor son.

“I have been commissioned, Very Reverend Father, to make known to you her Majesty’s wish. F. de Ravignan assured me that you would do all in your power to gratify this mother’s desire, and I have it in my power to promise that she will retain a deep and lasting sense of the favour.

“TROGNON,

“Principal Secretary to

“H.R.H. Mgr. the Prince de Joinville.”

F. Roothaan accordingly hastened to grant the request, and thus informed F. de Ravignan of his compliance: “You acted very properly in saying that you had no doubt of my complying with the wish of the pious mother in her Christian sorrow. I got your letter on Saturday, and that same evening I arranged my intentions. My course was this: I reckon on the application of twelve hundred Masses a week. According to the pious wish, I began by appropriating to it three hundred this week, which is Holy Week. I will do the same in Easter Week, and then, the week after Easter, I will apply to it six hundred. I have appointed the greater number for the latter week, in order that the pious mother may know of the applica-

tion, and may in a more special manner unite her own prayers. I have done all this, my dear Father, with great good-will and much pleasure, being fully persuaded that we shall in good time see great miracles granted by the mercy of our Lord to the prayers and sighs of a pious mother for the salvation of her children.

"As I am speaking of the use I make of my treasure, you may be sure that the Conferences, and especially the Retreat at Notre-Dame, were not forgotten. *Ante te omne desiderium*—all my desire is to thee—and by this treasure I am able to give it force and efficacy."

Just at this time, F. de Ravignan was called on to offer comfort to his own mother; he was unable to stand by her bed-side. She was dying at Bordeaux, and he must preach in Paris, sacrificing his filial duty to his apostolic work. He was able, however, to write, on March 19, 1843:

"My very dear Mother: Detained at Paris by the sacred duties which God has laid upon me, I grieve that I cannot go and join my brothers and sisters in affectionate and careful attendance around you. The Lord has sent you new and grievous sufferings; what would I not do to relieve them! At least I can daily, at the holy altar, offer the Sacrifice of the Mass for my dear, good mother. The Blood of Jesus Christ intercedes for you far better than I could do. It will obtain for you resignation and strength, the graces we all so much need. Yes, let us trust in God's boundless mercy!"

About the same time he wrote to a pious lady, a friend of the family:

"My poor mother, now seventy years old, has had a fourth attack, which leaves little room for hope; God has shown us a great favour in leaving her the full use of her faculties. Our good Fathers at

Bordeaux fill my place by her side. May God's will be done always and in all things!"

No sooner was F. de Ravignan at liberty to leave Paris than he hastened on his way to Bordeaux; but he came too late. Perhaps God chose to withhold the son's presence at this last moment in order to purify the heart of the mother, which at the time of the first sacrifice had been led too far by affection. She saw around her death-bed the religious brethren of her son, all desirous of supplying for his absence; before long the son himself, whom she had so seldom met here below, joined her in heaven, never to part again.

On April 28, 1843, F. de Ravignan wrote from Bordeaux: "I left Paris on Monday; my mother had, not many hours before, come to the close of her long agony of forty days. I came in time to be present at the funeral. Pray for her soul, which has passed to a better life." Now let us see how the children of God comfort each other. F. Roothaan's answer was, "I will not forget your dear mother before the Lord. *Sursum corda*, Let us lift up our hearts!"

Shortly before the death of his mother, he learned that his younger brother, Jules de Ravignan, had just died a Christian death. While the blow was yet fresh, he wrote: "Now Jules is with God; I rest upon this thought. How beautiful is religion! it gives us joy even close to the grave. My poor brother! but shall I lament him? He is leaving this life, and willingly would I be in his place, did not God's will and His glory require that my toil continue." He was continually recurring to this desire of death, his leading idea his whole life through. The smallest event was enough to arouse it in him. He could not witness the death of one of his brethren, or of any pious Christian, without a feeling akin to jealousy;

he found no full satisfaction until his own turn came.

Before finishing the story of the apostolic works which occupied this period of ten years, we must mention the victories gained by F. de Ravignan over the Russian schism. About this time, Providence had brought together in Paris some young men of rank, belonging to the first families in Russia. Doubts already tormented them, and they went to seek light from the religious, whom the high opinion of all men marked out as most able to impart it to them. The work which the preaching of F. de Ravignan had begun was completed by his conversation, and soon a series of abjurations, following one another very closely, came to encourage him in his labour.

The same reasons as compelled some of the noble converts not to make public avowal of their new faith force us also to suppress their names, so dear to Heaven and to F. de Ravignan. But there is one whom death has carried beyond the reach of this law which prudence imposes, and we may be allowed to mention the name at least of Gregory Schouvaloff, once a Count, afterwards a religious of the Order of Barnabites.

Count Schouvaloff has given us a touching account of his conversion. We must confine ourselves to a single extract ; it relates his first interview with F. de Ravignan. "It was Thy grace, O God, that led me when first I applied to him. Never shall I forget it. It was during Holy Week. On the eve of the happy day I was listening to a sermon of his, when I felt a kind of irresistible longing to go and open my heart to him, and the next morning, as early as six o'clock, I was at Notre-Dame before the altar where he was saying Mass. After half an hour, Thou didst bring me to his presence, the presence of him who was thence-

forth to be my director, my father, my guide, my stay, and my support. 'My Father,' I said to him, 'I have not come to ask whether I ought to become a Catholic: I am a Catholic in heart, I am perfectly convinced, and I am resolved to make every sacrifice for my faith.' And F. de Ravignan smiled with pleasure; his Catholic, his saintly soul diffused itself over his features. The zealous priest gave me the counsels which I had the happiness to follow, and with which Thy wisdom itself inspired him."

On January 6, 1843, Count Schouvaloff abjured the schism in the chapel called "*des Oiseaux*," which was the usual scene of these pious ceremonies. From this moment the closest intimacy was established between this fresh fugitive from error and the fortunate instrument of his return to the faith. Circumstances compelled Count Schouvaloff to return to Russia; but in 1855 he felt the need of consulting on the affairs of his soul him whom he called the *Apostle a thousand times blessed*. By the intervention of F. de Ravignan, he obtained leave to enter France, notwithstanding the war then raging between that country and his own; and to the same enlightened guide, to whom, after God, he owed the grace of living in the Catholic Church, he was indebted for the further happiness of dying in a poor religious habit.

One of the friends of Count Schouvaloff, an attaché at the Russian embassy in France, returned to the true faith about the same time. Under the powerful impression of grace, a strong inclination became developed in his soul, and the young convert hastened at once to express a desire to become a religious of the Society. At this time a close watch was kept up, in the interest of the schismatic Church, over all the Russians who had any communication with F. de Ravignan. Some

abjurations were known, others were suspected; and there was reason to fear that the entry of the young diplomatist into the Society of Jesus might have the effect of aggravating these annoying proceedings.

Mme. de Swetchine, who had been converted by F. Rozaven at St Petersburg, resided in Paris, forming the centre of the illustrious colony; but, above all, she regarded the candidate for religious life as her own adopted son. The highest society of Paris, attracted by her eminent gifts of head and heart, was at the time gathered round this distinguished lady, who had so early learned to value the Comte Joseph de Maistre. She thought right to mention to F. de Ravignan the fears entertained by her countrymen. She was a true Catholic, and she thanked God for the young nobleman's generous resolve. But the posture of affairs was delicate; the anger both of a powerful family and of a persecuting government might be reckoned upon. It might well seem that at least some delay was necessary in the interest of the good cause itself.

F. de Ravignan wrote his answer from Saint-Acheul, where he was engaged in directing his new spiritual son in his retreat. We may quote some passages from this answer, which is a monument at once of fearless zeal and religious prudence:—

“MADAM,—In beginning this letter, I beg God to give me a share in your cherished convictions, and in the feelings of true and enlightened piety which fill your breast. With thoughts of you before me, with the valued remembrance of you for, I may say, companion and guide, I take part in our young friend's serious deliberations. While we sincerely desired to seek the will of God alone; while we preserved that state of holy indif-

ference and of liberty to follow conscience which, when considering the future to be chosen, the rules of the Society and the most imperative duty exact ; the touching expression of your wishes and fears, your letter, so full of confidence, could not leave our minds. . . . I have accordingly taken the Book of the Exercises ; that holy book which our Blessed Father bequeathed us. I have done no more than distribute its pages into convenient portions. It was right that my whole work should be directed, and with God's help it has been directed, to maintain true peace and liberty in the soul of the son whom grace has given me. In whatever direction my fatherly feelings pointed, whatever hopes of perfection and happiness I formed for him whom I saw placed beside me in our Saviour's hands, I unhesitatingly put aside every expression of a strong wish on his part ; I allowed of no declaration by him of a tendency which yet seemed to me constant and calm. The holy prudence of the Institute directed and instructed me, and six whole days of preparation and prayer were required, while it was forbidden to deliberate, or to look forward to any result. Well, God Himself, by His Spirit, arranged all. What part had I, or what could I have done ? I still feel astonishment, struck by the abundance of calm grace and of freedom of action which were secured under the influence of meditations of the most serious character. It seemed to me that all was settled. I met with nothing but marks that the final decision would be most reliable and perfect. St Ignatius has himself pointed out these marks in his admirable rules on the Discernment of Spirits, and on the Election of a State of Life.

“Then I set before our young friend the full seriousness of the course of which he was thinking. I drew his attention to all that the question in-

volved, and I left him alone with God and himself for twenty-four hours, without speaking to him, or even seeing him. I could do nothing but join with you in your prayers.

"This morning, after Mass and Communion, he brought me his final decision in writing. After reading it attentively, I should be false to my conscience did I not recognise in him a true vocation.

"Your good son in our Lord believes that your fears respecting the Russian Catholics must be exaggerated. Your feelings, as his mother, will approve his resolve never henceforth to expose to any mishap a vocation which has been tried and approved before God."

The director had acted as the Society always acts in such cases; it was enough for him to stand by while God directed the deliberation. The young nobleman heard a voice which called on him to labour one day for the salvation of Russia, and the diplomatist became a Jesuit. But Providence did not allow that the fears with which this step filled the illustrious lady should be accomplished. F. de Ravignan put his whole trust in God, and he was not deceived.

Thirteen years after having settled this vocation to the Society, F. de Ravignan sent to the Noviciate of the Barnabites, the Comte de Schouvaloff, who had for some time, like his countryman, entertained thoughts of being a Jesuit. The Spirit of God bloweth where He will, and the wise director had received from heaven a peculiar skill in distinguishing the different roads by which souls are drawn towards perfection. We shall not repeat here the history of this beautiful and most affecting vocation, which the fervent Barnabite has himself told so movingly; we refer our readers to his Memoirs, which, now he is gone, come to us as the sacred testament dictated by his faith and piety.



CHAPTER XI.

THE PERSECUTION IN 1843 AND 1844.

Public Opinion directed against the Jesuits—M. Guizot sends for F. de Ravignan—Charge against him at Rome—Endeavour to separate his Cause from that of his Brethren—Publication of his Defence of the Society.



IN the year 1843, a season began for the Society of Jesus which is not strange to it, a season of persecution. Hitherto warning had been given of the approaching tempest only by local and partial annoyances, the work of subordinate agents; but now, beyond doubt, a general order was sent round; all the world seemed leagued against the Jesuits; at one time it seemed as though the nineteenth century would proscribe them as the eighteenth had done.

From the very beginning of the struggle F. General had thought that circumstances naturally pointed at F. de Ravignan to be Superior of the house at Paris. Hearing this report, or threat, as he considered it, he hastened to lay before F. Roothaan the grounds of his unwillingness:—"I have thought it right to wait for twenty-four hours before answering; I will venture to submit to you some humble remarks, after thinking them over in God's presence.

“Perhaps under existing circumstances at Paris, your Paternity has thought that my old connexion with many men of influence, and the ease with which I could communicate with the authorities both in Church and State, would be advantageous in the management of our beloved house at Paris, the object of so many varied attacks.

“As concerns my mere position and ministrations, my influence would be exactly the same were I Superior of the house or a simple subject. F. Provincial and F. Rector can always dispose of my services, and I shall never fail in devotedness to them, any more than in love for the Society, which grows daily more dear to me.

“Nothing, then, that I see out of doors suggests any advantage in my being invested with the office of Superior. Within doors, I am thoroughly convinced that any one else would do better than I.

“It seems to me that if I keep my present position, I shall be just as well off in communicating with the authorities. The King’s ministers and the Archbishop have dealt with me as one who, unworthy as I am, in their eyes represents the Society.

“My intercourse with persons of every age, rank, and country has grown to such an extent that I really find it difficult to fulfil the duties which the Rule requires of me. Of course, Saints have done much more than I do; but I should need something which I am wholly without, before I could succeed in doing what they accomplished amid their ceaseless occupation. I do not feel in myself that strength and that grace which find time for all. I confess that I suffered too much when for five years I was in name Superior at Bordeaux; and that I caused both the other Fathers and their works to suffer too much not to feel the greatest dread of a new burden.

"The decision lies with your Paternity. I accept beforehand with all my heart your final determination, whatever it may be."

F. General having agreed to these arguments, F. de Ravignan hastened to reply. "I declare, my gratitude is deep and lively. I have still need to live long in obedience, without being called on to command."

The noble part which circumstances led F. de Ravignan to take, compels us to halt and call up some sad remembrances.

The first endeavour was to stir up public opinion against the Jesuits, then to set the Government in motion : neither task was hard ; all that was needed was for hatred to hold out a hand to fear. Thus the Society was put under the ban of France. A rivalry sprang up between the newspapers and the professors in their lecture-rooms ; invectives passed for arguments, dreams for facts, romance for history. The hardihood with which calumny was propagated was equalled only by the credulity of the public. Fables the most absurd were caught up and passed from mouth to mouth till they reached the lofty regions where power resides.

On the 1st of May, the day on which the King's birthday was kept, the Princes and many of the ministers were assembled in a room at the Tuileries, when a person of influence disclosed a new and horrible plot : there were arms stored in the cellars of Saint-Sulpice ; the Jesuits held club-meetings there, and even the very day before, F. de Ravignan had been there, concerting measures with his accomplices. Luckily there was present a person who could give a truer account. "I was at that meeting yesterday," said a lady of the Court ; "we were drawing a raffle for the poor people of the Holy Family." And she went on with affected simplicity, "There

were two or three hundred families so lucky as to be set up with a coffee-pot or a saucepan." After this the pretended plot could meet only with laughter.

While the public mind was thus beduped, a well-known author, at that time tutor to one of the Princes, writing in the *Journal des Débats*, expressed his sense of "the infinite skill with which F. de Ravignan concealed the pitiless reaction of which he was one of the principal instruments;" and addressing "him and all the other monks of the Rue des Postes and the Rue Sala," he exclaimed, "What have I to do with your virtues, if you bring a plague upon me?" This expression took men's fancy, but they failed to notice that this vapouring phrase was merely a compound of calumny, nonsense, and blasphemy.

But nothing could calm the vague fears with which the Government was filled by the name of Jesuit, or rather by the outcry raised about their name. Informations against the houses of the Society were laid before the diocesan authorities; it was hoped that the odium of a violent suppression might be avoided by the bishops themselves closing the houses, but this was not the only measure adopted: to show any mark of good-will to the obnoxious religious was looked on by those in power as an act of hostility. The Bishop of Angers, in addressing his clergy assembled for their Retreat, allowed himself to use some words of sympathy for the Jesuits. He soon received an official rebuke. After a few days, M. Martin, the Minister of Worship, wrote to the Prelate expressing his regret that such language had been used, and recommending him to avoid for the future any declaration of the kind. The Bishop answered with the utmost freedom and courage. After explaining the grounds of the good-will he so strongly felt towards the Society of Jesus, he went on to say: "The true

enemies of the Government are neither the Jesuits nor the clergy, they are the men whose works against morality and religion infect society; they are those who train up youth to indifference and carelessness; those who fear to see the education of the rising generation who form the hope of the state, brought through the clergy under the influence of religion."

The Ministers, who were living in constant fear, tried to retaliate by giving us repeated alarms. Every question put in the Chambers led to something new being required of the Jesuits. We learn the difficulty of the position from a note of F. de Ravignan: "You really ought to be here," he wrote to F. General, on Dec. 30, 1843, "to form a right idea of the state of things; you should have often conversed with our public men, encompassed as they are with difficulties respecting us, in order to understand how much embarrassment there is. Twice during the short Advent at Rouen I was sent for to Paris by the Keeper of the Seals and by the Director of Worship. It is sometimes one thing, sometimes another . . . Shut up our chapels, dismiss our novices, send all our theologians out of France. M. X—— is drawing up a memorial which throws all the Government into consternation. It is a wretched, miserable state of affairs; but such is our life of ceaseless vexation."

The day before this note was written, on Dec. 29, F. de Ravignan had for the third time an interview with M. Guizot. He thus reported his impressions: "I was astonished at his lofty views, his esteem for the Society, the way in which he dismissed all the prejudices and attacks of which we are the objects. I know positively that he has spoken in our favour in the Council of Ministers. The Nuncio at Paris, and many other persons, believe that there is more to hope in the interests of Catholicity from M.

Guizot, than from all the other public men of our time. It is certain that among all our statesmen he entertains the largest and highest views, and the most in favour of liberty both of education and of the Church. I should not of course place unlimited confidence in his politics or in his opinions, but yet we may rightly think better of him than of most of our governors."

I have met with a curious document, a minute of this third conversation between the Religious and the Minister.

"M. GUIZOT, *kindly*, What do you wish to say to me ?

"F. DE RAVIGNAN. According to the Minister of Worship, there is some fear of M. X——.

"M. GUIZOT. We may leave M. X—— and his vagaries alone. But there is a great deal of prejudice in the mind of the public; the case of the clergy is connected in men's minds with the journey of the *Legitimists* to London. A great many people are credulous enough to believe statements about you on which I place no reliance. You must be prudent, and confine yourselves to the exercise of your ministry; the Government has no feeling against you. I believe that you can still do great good to society by directing the current of thought, if you make a good use of your influence, of which you always have a great deal.

"F. DE RAVIGNAN. I must assure you that we are really devoted exclusively to the business of the sacred ministry, following the spirit of the Church, and in particular of the Sovereign Pontiff, to whom we make profession of peculiar obedience in the spiritual order.

"M. GUIZOT. The Sovereign Pontiff is, I know, altogether beyond and above political parties. . . . But sometimes your Order, allow me to say, for I

have studied its history pretty closely,—well, twice your Order has linked itself unduly with fallen dynasties, with the Stuarts for instance, in opposition to the true interests of the Church. Governments cannot command the course of events; these changes come inevitably, and all must conform to them. It is of no profit to religion to struggle against a new spirit, new institutions. Your Order made a mistake in this matter.

“F. DE RAVIGNAN. Allow me to remark to your Excellency that the Society had persecutions to suffer even under the Stuarts The force which it resisted differed entirely from political power.

“M. GUIZOT. No doubt there was persecution, a Protestant revolution, with which you could not unite yourselves.

“F. DE RAVIGNAN. As to affection for fallen dynasties, no one I think could aptly call it a characteristic of the spirit of the Society. It is the last thing we are accused of. . . . Rather we are truly men of the Church whose spirit we follow, carrying on the work of faith and the ministry of the Gospel in all States, under every form of government. We are in truth strangers to all party action. If we have intercourse with the Legitimists, it is because they are religious men, and come to seek the aid of our ministry. And then, facts say the same.

“M. GUIZOT. One fact: one of your Fathers at Lyons has been distributing portraits of the Duc de Bordeaux, and pamphlets in his favour. I have mentioned it to no one but the Nuncio.

“F. DE RAVIGNAN. The Nuncio mentioned it to us. We wrote to Lyons; all the Fathers were questioned by the Superior, and all gave the most formal denial.

“M. GUIZOT. I have no doubt of it; but there is

so much prejudice concerning you. However, this legitimist movement is superficial ; it has no foundation.

"F. DE RAVIGNAN. We number two hundred priests. We preach ; what facts has any one to charge against us ? our words ought to betray us.

"M. GUIZOT. No facts ; if there were some isolated instances, I should still attach no importance to them. The main question will be about liberty of teaching ; no concessions will be made, for a wise Government never makes any. But under certain conditions all will be admitted. You must not be excluded, provided you conform to what is required."

These words, we know well, were not borne out by facts. But we all see that in a minister there are two persons, corresponding to the double part which has to be played. The speaker in the Chambers is not always the same man as the speaker in the closet. Public opinion dragged the majority in the Chambers astray, and the majority dragged the minister.

In organising the defence, F. de Ravignan multiplied himself, doing the work of many. God Himself had set him in the front, and therefore in him his superiors trusted, with him our friends concerted their measures. Far from shunning this labour and responsibility, he gave up all repose and marched to the fight with resolution, looking for little from men to whom belongs the present, but hoping all from God, Who alone commands the future.

In this struggle against prejudice and passion, so wonderful was the moderation of his views, and the perfect aptness of his conduct, so accurate his forecast, and so upright his whole conduct, that malignity itself never could take him

unawares. Constantly harassed by numberless enemies, sometimes embarrassed by the action of friends too eager or too fearful, he yielded nothing: he injured no one, he compromised none of his party, he always exposed himself, and in face of F. de Ravignan calumny was for once forced to disarm.

Yet it must be allowed that his generalship did not satisfy all who fought under the same flag with him. There are some characters in love with extremes, in whose eyes it is impossible to go far enough, or to strike with sufficient force: they see defect wherever there is no excess. This suited neither the character of F. de Ravignan nor his line of action; his was the disciplined courage of a soldier, not the headstrong recklessness of an adventurer; every intemperate act seemed to him a perilous piece of weakness, and while his enemies never could tear from him any concession, the most forward of his friends never won from him an act of imprudence.

Towards the end of the year 1843 he suddenly found that complaints were made of him at Rome by persons whose character and intentions certainly deserve our esteem and respect. But really they should have thought twice before bringing a charge of feebleness against a man of such energy placed in such a position. F. General, who was sick at the time, was startled: he commissioned F. de Villefort to write at once to F. de Ravignan to ask an explanation. All the charges came to one, excess in prudence. A Superior of a Seminary, it was said in this letter, had been moved to laughter at the Jesuit's fears. The answer was as follows:—

“VERY REVEREND FATHER,—This very day I received the letter which your Paternity was good

enough to cause F. de Villefort to write to me. I am too conscious how much I deserve reproof not to accept as well-deserved whatever blame may attach to my conduct. I say it in all simplicity: I feel astounded and covered with confusion that I am allowed to remain in the Society. Be so kind, Very Reverend Father, as always to reprove me with freedom, for which I shall be very grateful; I shall only be the more tenderly attached to my vocation and my Superiors.

“But to think that I have given you so much pain is a great grief, and affects me much. As I write to you, in spite of myself, my eyes fill with tears; I feel in my heart so tender and filial a respect for your Paternity. You have for many years past given me so many proofs of confidence and affection, that I cannot here tell how great is my sorrow and self-reproach. Pardon me, Reverend Father, and do not withdraw your indulgence and kindness from me; I am ready to submit with joy to any penance you shall please to put upon me; I ask it earnestly.

“If I have acted in opposition to the spirit of the Society, and to my duty, I have no wish to justify myself; I will only explain the true state of the case in the order of the questions which F. de Villefort sent me on your behalf.

“First. On the publication of the book on the *Monopoly*, I am not aware of having said that this book produced a *very unfortunate* posture of affairs; but in common with many persons of the soundest judgment, and most thoroughly devoted to the Church and the Society, I did regard this book as an obstacle to results which the marked movement in favour of religion seemed to be bringing to pass more quietly. In this sense I expressed disapproval of the harsh language of the book. I may have expressed fears for the consequences; as to

the existence of the Society in France, I knew how much irritation existed against us on this account in the minds of persons of influence. I may have said and thought that under these circumstances the publication was dangerous, perhaps ill-timed ; I do not really believe that I ever said or thought anything else.

“Secondly. It is false, absolutely false, that I or any Father of the Paris house refused absolution to any young men who were intending to protest against the impious language of Michelet and Quinet. It was the opinion of persons of judgment, lay and clerical, that it was better to avoid any open collision. I still think that under the circumstances, present as we were on the spot, we fulfilled a duty in urging the young men not to proceed. It would have been a mere evil with no possible good result.

“Thirdly. It is untrue ; I never spoke to M. Guizot in a manner unbecoming a Professed Father of the Society. None but he and I can know and tell what passed. Certainly I never began any discussion with him about the doctrines of Calvinism. My two first sentences were, as nearly as possible, ‘Differences of belief separate us ; I am a Jesuit.’ My conscience tells me that in his presence I was free, yet reserved.

“Fourthly. I never said to the Minister of Worship, nor to any one else, ‘We have no existence.’ I spoke with openness and simplicity. Besides, I had been sent for by the Ministers, or I visited them, in the character of a Jesuit, on purpose to defend the Society. How, then, could I say, ‘We have no existence’ ?

“There has no doubt been much to find fault with in my words and actions in presence both of seculars and of Ours. Yet it appears to me that the course followed by the Superiors at Paris has been

that which true prudence dictated, and without their sanction I have done nothing and said nothing of importance.

"I do not find in my heart, Very Reverend Father, either fear or want of faith. I will fight the battle of the Society openly, as long as shall be required; I shall always keep hope. Incessantly plunged as I am, by the wish of my Superiors, in these miserable negotiations, I confess I should sometimes prefer open persecution. But ought we to provoke it?"

F. General answered: "I hasten to answer your letter, and to tell you that I am no less glad to see how false the charges against you were than sorry for the grief they caused you. My heart now is full and open. You have behaved as a true child of the Society. As to the *Monopoly*, you did just what I should have done myself.

"Thank God, my dear Father, for sending you this cross. I thank Him for it on your behalf. I look on it as a ground of hope that He will long continue to make use of your ministry in winning souls to Him. Such trials have been the lot of all apostolic men. So, my dear Father, *consolemur invicem*, let us comfort each other. The Lord is pleased to try His servants. Blessed be He *in æternum et ultra*."

F. de Ravignan, as we may well believe, did not much trouble himself about all the fancies conjured up by ill-will or by misguided zeal. His usual expression was that he let all this pass; but his close union with his brethren, in mind and heart as well as in name, caused him to feel deeply wounded when an attempt was made to separate him from them. However, that the proscription of the Jesuits might the more easily be carried out, it seemed that no better course was open than to

give him a position detached from the rest of his Order, or even to make him quit it.

Such were the tactics of the enemies of the Society, especially of such as were led to attack it only out of prejudice, or from the difficulties of their position; for such as were stirred up against it by evil passions—and they were, thank God, but few—made no exceptions, and took no trouble to select their arguments. But the well-meaning persons who had been led astray by the lies to which Pascal had given popularity, and men in office who were forced to sacrifice the Jesuits for the sake of keeping their places, quieted their consciences, and answered all objections by saying, with M. Royer-Collard, “F. de Ravignan is artless enough to believe himself a Jesuit.”

This was said repeatedly in the Chambers and by the Ministers in private. What other line could be taken by M. Guizot, who is sometimes mentioned by the newspapers among F. de Ravignan’s hearers? He made no concealment of his esteem and sympathy for the orator of Notre-Dame. Complaint was once made to the Minister of an attack which, it was pretended, the preacher had made in one of his Conferences against the University. M. Guizot rejected the charge, saying that F. de Ravignan’s wisdom and prudence were well known, and that a name such as his was safe from any imputation.

What other line could be taken by M. de Salvandy, who personally felt something more than esteem for F. de Ravignan? As long since as 1838 this Minister had conceived a high opinion of his virtue and talent, as we learn from the following lines written to Rome in that year, with the signature of the orator: “M. de Salvandy, the Minister of Public Instruction, has been speaking to the Archbishop of Paris on a scheme for a theo-

logical Sorbonne. My name was mentioned as a Professor; I am astonished that the idea has been entertained for a moment."

Lastly, what other course could be taken by M. Martin, the Minister of Worship? In a letter written by a Bishop who had just had an interview with him, we read: "The Minister is very well satisfied with F. de Ravignan, for whom he feels esteem and respect. He adds that the members of the Society are individually excellent persons; it is only the body that is dangerous and opposed to the law."

It was said, too, that the Society ought to make concessions in order to keep F. de Ravignan, an assertion which manifests the profoundest ignorance both of law and fact, of the nature of the Society, and of the Father's own character. The Society made no concessions even when they were demanded; it can bear to part with its members, but not with one point of its rules. F. de Ravignan, on his side, would never have accepted concessions, even had there been any intention of making them.

A rumour also spread abroad that F. de Ravignan had left the Society, and as this last story was the most damaging to the Jesuits, and the most absurd, it naturally met with most credence. The news spread from Paris to Rome. F. General could not do F. de Ravignan the injustice of even harbouring a doubt of his steadiness. He was satisfied with telling him the circumstance, and adding: "I have not had the least misgiving as to your own dispositions; I know them too well. I cannot even conceive the possibility of my good F. de Ravignan letting himself be so caught. Why, he would be mad! Excuse, dear Father, the word which drops naturally from my pen."

The French Jesuits well knew their brother's

warm attachment to his vocation ; they had heard him exclaim, with reference to some defections, "What! is the Society to be like a drawer, to be shut and open? is the chain of the vows to be so easily made fast or loosed?" There was no change in his thoughts and language on the subject up to his last breath. Thus, some years afterwards, he wrote on a like occasion:—"Ah, how blind are they ; how much to be mourned over! too late will they feel what a mother they have deserted! And then the remembrance of their vocation, and the community life! Poor *Abbés*! how I grieve for them! Yes! let us examine, let us try ourselves ; what thanksgiving should we not render to God when we feel ourselves, through His goodness, bound body and soul to our Mother, to the Society! When these sorrowful separations occur, let our hearts, our inmost being, draw closer yet to that vocation which God still preserves to us. The Lord has been pleased to send me a bodily trial ; in this state, and with deep peace in my soul, I have fervently renewed all my vows ; I even feel some return of a lively wish to regain health, which is far from being my ordinary state of mind."

The edification to be derived from knowing the personal feelings of the Jesuit against whom so many efforts were made, was not to be confined to his brethren of France and Rome. He was made a spectacle to the world, and in the face of the world he must make his protest, declaring that he was a Jesuit, and showing what a Jesuit is. He bestirred himself, therefore, taking for motto the words of St Hilary : "It is time to speak . . . to keep silence longer would be deemed despair ; it would not be moderation ;" and he broke forth in a work, the sound of which at once pealed through the length and breadth of France:—

"Prudence has its laws, its limits. Conjunctions

occur in the life of men, when to give the clearest explanations becomes a binding duty, which must be fulfilled.

"I have an avowal to make. Now, above all, have I need to make it when the power of falsehood is likely to regain among us an empire which had seemed overturned; when by old hatreds and worn-out fictions the truthfulness of language is corrupted anew, and the very nature of right and justice changed. I am a Jesuit; that is to say, a religious of the Society of Jesus.

"It is due to myself to make this declaration; it is due to my ministry, to my brethren in the priesthood, to the young men, to all the faithful who honour me with their confidence; it is due to the Church, to God.

"To most men I here tell nothing new; but I do what my conscience, my position, and my liberty require.

"Just now, too, there is so much shame, so much insult to be received by using this name, that I cannot forego claiming before the world my right to so rich a heritage. That name is my name; with all simplicity I say it; many will remember the Gospel, and will understand that I say it with joy."

This avowal having been made thus solemnly, it became impossible to proscribe the Jesuits without by the same act proscribing the orator of Notre-Dame. But while he assumed his share in the responsibility, he necessarily appealed to the Charter against the old laws and old decrees which had driven out the Society, and the revival of which it was sought to enforce on the government. Hence he took up the defence of all religious orders at once, and proceeded:—

"While I was a Catholic and a Frenchman, enjoying all the rights of a citizen, and having my

liberty of conscience secured to me by the fundamental law of our state, I discovered in myself a need of approaching as nearly to evangelical perfection as it should be given me to do. The solemn vows of religion appeared to be the way of perfection which I was seeking; it is a way approved by the Church, and it also had in my eyes another advantage, that it belonged exclusively to the domain of conscience. It is true that the law does not recognise religious vows; but what of that? The law does not concern itself with these vows; they may be taken, the law knows nothing of it; they may be broken, the law does not interfere. But to proscribe them is impossible, without putting into the hands of the Government powers of most odious inquisition and intolerance.

“To proclaim men to be free, and then forbid them a thing belonging so entirely to their interior and private life as the religious profession, would be an open contradiction, would be an attack on liberty of conscience in the most vital, most sacred point.

“If men, priests, combine for the sake of life in community, and for simply religious purposes, they cannot of course claim before the law any political or civil rights as a corporation, and we make no claim of the kind; but the law cannot touch this body of priests, especially as they exercise in the world no other functions than those for which they, like all other priests, are empowered by the authority of the Bishop; otherwise religious liberty is a lie, and the public right of Frenchmen, the fundamental law, is a deceit; for then words must have lost their meaning, and sounds no longer express ideas.

“Did the Charter proclaim liberty of conscience or no? is evangelical perfection a right of conscience or no? Yet religious life is nothing but

evangelical perfection ; this is the solemn teaching of the Church, as liberty of conscience is the solemn promise of the Charter.

“If, then, I, a Frenchman, I choose to be a Benedictine, a Dominican, a Jesuit in France, by what right do you hinder me?”

Having covered his brethren with the ægis of his name, and having joined with them and with all the religious of France in appealing to liberty of conscience and to the freedom of the Gospel, he sought to set his Order right in the eyes of France, deceived as they were by the falsehoods of the newspapers, and by the libels which daily issued from the press. Remembering the conversation which on the 29th of December of the preceding year he had had with M. Guizot, the President of the Council of Ministers, he did not hesitate to challenge an examination of the charges which calumny made so weighty against the Jesuits. He ventured to say :—

“Have you any knowledge of us, you who would call down all the rigour of proscription on us, priests, Frenchmen, citizens free and devoted to our country? Have you ever seen us? have you ever heard us speak?”

“What word has escaped our lips that has troubled the public peace, and weakened the respect due to the laws? Yet our two hundred voices have been heard in many pulpits, in the largest cities and in the humblest hamlets.

“What authority in the State has accused, what authority in the Church condemns us? Is there one among us charged with a single definite act of crime? Prejudice, inclination, presumption, are not enough; they cannot stand in place of facts and proofs, and the guilt of a society cannot come out really and fairly except in the faults of its members; to the members, to the individuals, be-

long all action, all guilt, all merit ; which among us are the guilty ones ?”

This was not enough ; an answer must be given to those who attacked the Institute itself, and who sought the enactment of new laws, if the old would not avail for its overthrow ; who said, like M. Dupin, “ I grant that some individual Jesuits have been upright and estimable men, great preachers, great mathematicians ; but the treatment they have received as an Order, as an association, has been merely what they deserved. The best among them might in an instant become vile and pernicious through the action of their law of obedience ; *the old man's staff* is their constant model. In France this has been felt instinctively ; from the very first every generous, sound, and uncorrupted feeling rose against them ; as an Order I know but one good word that can be truly said for them ; they deserve praise for the virtues which owe their birth or their increase to the spirit of aversion aroused by their presence.”

The title given by F. de Ravignan to his defence was, “ On the Existence and Institute of the Jesuits.” He gave a short statement in the following words, of the points on which he called for the judgment of the conscience of the people :—

“ I will tell what we are ; this is unknown to many ; I will explain it clearly. It will become plain when four matters are understood : the spirit which we draw from the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius ; the obedience to which we are bound by the Constitutions ; the apostolate exercised by the Society in its missions ; and the doctrines which it holds.

“ I speak of what I know. There is nothing in the world of which I am more certain, or with which I am more thoroughly acquainted, than what I am about to say, and it shall be the simple

truth. It may be rejected by men ; God sees it, and He is my judge."

It was not necessary that this exposition of the spirit of St Ignatius, and of the labours and doctrines of his children, should be an apology properly so called ; it was not a detailed reply to the often-renewed charges against the Society of Jesus. Such an apology had lately appeared under the title, "On the Jesuits, by a Jesuit ;" and some generous friends of the Society had not been afraid to raise their voice, in the midst of the hubbub of passion, to refute the falsehoods, invented in perversion of its history and constitutions, which filled the newspapers, pamphlets, and lecture-halls. F. de Ravignan took a higher ground, going up to the source of this calumny and hatred, and instead of refuting the objections one by one, he overthrew them all at a single stroke ; for controversy he substituted a simple statement of the question, explaining what the Jesuits are.

To speak thus, a voice was needed which could command universal attention, enforce the respect even of enemies, and venture to conclude in these terms :—

"If I am doomed to be worsted in the struggle, before I shake from my feet the dust of the land which gave me birth, I will go, and for a last time sit down at the foot of the pulpit of Notre-Dame ; there, bearing in my heart the ineffaceable consciousness of outraged justice, I will mourn for my country, and in all sorrow say : ' There was a day when truth was told her ; there was a voice to proclaim it ; and justice was not done ; the heart to do it was wanting. We leave behind us the Charter violated, liberty of conscience oppressed, justice outraged, another great iniquity added to the score ; they will gain no profit from it. But a better day will dawn ; and in my heart I feel

an assurance which cannot deceive, that this day is not far distant. History will not allow the career which I now close to be forgotten; she will let fall on this age of injustice the full weight of her stern judgment. Thou wilt not permit, O Lord, that iniquity shall enjoy uninterrupted triumph without retribution in this world; Thou wilt command that the justice which is destined to endure throughout eternity shall be anticipated before the end of time."

Thus we see the care of Providence for the Society in the growth of the renown of F. de Ravignan, until at last it became a power able to communicate strength to others.

The appearance of this book was announced by the Catholic journals of the metropolis on January 25, 1844; the first copy was purchased by the Minister of Worship. His Excellency had not been previously consulted, and he was much displeased that F. de Ravignan had formally forced on the public the knowledge that the Society existed in France. But what were we to do? If we kept silence, we were accused of reserve: it was a secret society. If we spoke out, the charge was indiscretion: it was an illegal society.

This unlooked-for publication had important consequences. The posture of affairs underwent an immediate change; by this act, Jesuits were brought within the protection of the general law. The Chambers asserted that they ought not to exist; the Ministers replied that they did not exist; and F. de Ravignan stood forward alone, and proved the Ministers to be in error by the title of his book, while the whole work contradicted the position of the Chambers. In the name of eternal justice and of the recent Charter, he entered into possession of that liberty of existence which was refused him in the name of obsolete laws; he

showed that the legal question was a judicial question ; and while the Jesuits were called to trial before the Chambers, he called the lawyers to trial before public opinion, and would not hesitate, if need arose, to appear before the Courts of Justice.

About the same time there was published a *Letter* from M. de Vatimesnil to F. de Ravignan, followed by a *Sketch of the Legal Position of Unrecognised Religious Associations in France*. The ex-Minister completed the line of defence begun by his revered friend, by showing that the old laws against religious orders were repealed, and indicating an impregnable position which they might take up, in case the Government determined to proceed against them before the tribunals. F. de Ravignan published this argument as a sequel to his own work, prefixing to it these lines : " In the following pages will be found the vigour and learning of the distinguished lawyer, united with the independence of a free mind, and the devotedness of a lofty soul. I publish them because I share his deep conviction that we are protected by the Charter and the law, and that the retired and private life of unrecognised religious bodies cannot be proscribed without violation of the fundamental law, and an outrage to liberty of conscience in a most vital and sacred point."

F. Lacordaire, by his assumption of the habit of St Dominic, had already taken the liberty which he needed not to ask for, and he now congratulated his brother in arms on the victory which he had in his turn achieved. A few days after the appearance of F. de Ravignan's work, the great Dominican, being present at a meeting of the Catholic Club, under the presidency of the Archbishop of Paris, exclaimed, " Were we in England, I should propose three cheers in honour of F. de Ravignan." These words were unanimously received with three rounds of applause.

On February 1, 1844, a deputation of fifteen young men, members of the Third Order of St Dominic, of which F. Lacordaire was the founder and director, waited on F. de Ravignan to present him an address of congratulation. It is right that the exact words should be given, as a memorial of brotherly union between the Sons of St Dominic and the Son of St Ignatius :—

“VERY REVEREND FATHER,—The Brotherhood of the Third Order of St Dominic has viewed with deep emotion an act which a beloved voice lately described as a great event for the Church of France. We do not venture to offer you, Very Reverend Father, our congratulations; we wish only to lay before you the expression of our gratitude and affection; and we purposely offer you this mark of our regard on the feast of St Ignatius the martyr, a day which, if it be no peculiar feast for you, at least brings to mind the holy Founder of your illustrious Society. We are glad to have an opportunity of showing our filial affection for you, who have so often given edification to our souls, and of telling you how happy we are to see this close and prolific union among the Catholic hearts of the various sons of a common Father, the servants of a common God. The impression is yet lively within us which was produced by a declaration, one in spirit with that which you have made; we are still full of sorrow at the departure of him whom we love as a Father; and we find comfort in approaching you, who have a share with him in the labours of the Apostolate, and by whose voice the pulpit of Notre-Dame is soon again to speak. Since last you left that pulpit, a persecution has arisen against you, the violence of which has been felt by us also through our sympathy and our fellowship with you, for our cause is one. We thank God that this persecution

has only added another to the triumphs gained by the Church, by the Society of Jesus, and by you, Very Reverend Father, the illustrious defender of both."

There are some names which gratitude will not allow us to omit while we are telling the history of the struggle carried on by F. de Ravignan in defence of his Society, and with it of all Religious Orders. The honour of having overcome his humility, and induced him to undertake the composition of his work, belongs to the Bishop of Orleans and M. de Vatimesnil. It must be added that he showed his manuscript to M. Trognon, at that time tutor to one of the Princes, and also to Count Molé, formerly President of the Council of Ministers; the literary taste of the one, the judgment of the other on points of honour and policy, commanded his fullest confidence. Count Molé and F. de Ravignan knew how to value each other from the very beginning of their acquaintance; and we may here make the passing remark that this their mutual esteem was the foundation of one of those old-fashioned friendships which recall the days of Lamoignon and Bourdaloue.

Having brought before our readers the orator of Notre-Dame taking up arms in defence of his brethren, and filling France with his renown, we are glad to complete the picture by returning to the humble cell in which he wrote his book. He drew it up at Saint-Acheul, amid the silence and peace of a House of Novices. Before beginning it, he followed the Exercises of St Ignatius for eight days, seeking inspiration by intercourse with Heaven. On July 13, 1843, he wrote, "On reaching this place I was very much pressed for time, and entered my Retreat immediately; I came out, I hope, with some improvement."

On the 30th of November of the same year, after

his return to Paris, F. de Ravignan wrote to F. Roothaan, "I have been employed for two whole months in writing something about the Society. It is finished at last; what it is worth I do not know. I have been happy in acting under obedience, but I do not deserve any divine blessing. Is what I have written to be published? I do not know; my Superiors will decide. Nobody whatever, even in this house, knows of my having prepared this work. It is very important that it should be kept secret. I venture to ask your Paternity to take care that nothing gets out on the subject at Rome; for a part of the effect will be due to the surprise which the unexpected publication will cause. I confine myself to explaining what we are.

"Prostrate before you, I beg your blessing. How keenly I feel the favour shown me that my presence in the Society is tolerated!"

On the appearance of the work, F. General thus congratulated the author: "I have read your work on the Society with the most lively interest. I see and feel in it the excellent head and heart of my dear friend F. de Ravignan, and his strong and tender love for our common mother. The introduction as well as the conclusion seem to me magnificent." F. Roothaan had good reason to say that the writer's whole self was in his book; his strength of mind is seen in the introduction, and all his heart flows out in the last pages.

F. de Ravignan kept his humility unimpaired in the midst of the applause with which his work was greeted on every side. M. Royer-Collard wrote to him on February 15, 1844, "Your eloquent defence of the Institute of the Jesuits enables me to understand the power of this wonderful fabric and the influence it has exercised. So far as we can compare things so unlike, we may say that though divided as far as heaven is from earth, Lycurgus

and Sparta were the cradle of St Ignatius. Sparta has passed away, the Jesuits will never pass. Christianity and the warring passions of man furnish them with a principle of immortality."

At the same time the author, with admirable simplicity, submitted to the remarks which he received from Rome. In each new edition he corrected the slight inaccuracies which were pointed out; on March 4, 1844, he wrote to F. General:

"The printing of the new edition of my work is now far advanced; I have taken care to make the chief corrections in the course of it. I have corrected what I said about two hundred millions of infidels having been converted in the course of two centuries. I had made the calculation, with the aid of one of our Fathers, with the data given by Humboldt in his Travels in America. . . . But I see that this calculation was not made with sufficient care.

"About the Exercises and the rest I have certainly gone wrong in many points, as I see very well. But, Very Reverend Father, I would still venture to remark with much respect, that as to the way of setting the holy Book of the Exercises before a public like that of Paris and France, there would, I think, have been some difficulty found in being more solid or simple.

"If ever this little work which has cost me so much trouble were to appear at a time when I had some leisure for the task, I would carefully rewrite it, and introduce all the corrections which your Paternity has sent me, and also all that F. Rozaven has been so very good as to mark.

"Believe me, Reverend Father, I am always happy and receive great comfort when you please to give me an admonition. I bless the Lord for it. I ought to receive far more reproofs; I have so much difficulty in enduring myself that I am aston-

ished at the patience and kindness with which my Superiors treat me."

F. de Ravignan concluded his letter with these words: "There is nothing new happening; we are left alone; we have made a great step, and, if I mistake not, have achieved *existence as a fact*. My old friend Vatimesnil has done us immense service by his Argument."

During the year 1844, four editions of the Existence and Institute of the Jesuits, being twenty-five thousand copies, were exhausted; the author himself corrected the seventh edition, published in 1855.





CHAPTER XII.

PERSECUTION CONTINUED IN 1845.

F. de Ravignan conveys to the Champions of the Society the thanks of F. General—He visits Vals and the Tomb of St Francis Regis—He attends the Chamber of Deputies on the 2d and 3d of May—Plan of Legal Resistance—M. Rossi: his Negotiations at Rome—Letter of F. de Ravignan to the Archbishop of Paris—Jubilee at Liège.



ROOTHAAN kept his eyes fixed upon Paris as the centre-point of the attack which was soon to pursue the Jesuits even to the foot of the Papal throne, and stir up against the Society the public feeling of Italy which the declamation of the Abbé Gioberti had already inflamed. He gave to his dear F. de Ravignan the assistance of his prayers, his advice, and encouragement, and even expressed gratitude to him. As early as the beginning of 1844 he wrote: "I thank you much for the steps you have taken in defence of this large and important part of my numerous family. St Ignatius will secure you a reward." The following year—year full of bitterness as it was—he testified the comfort he found even at the foot of Calvary in that beautiful language which none but men of prayer can speak or understand :—

“Continue your ministrations at Paris. Such, my dear Father, is the advice you receive from all who seek before all things the kingdom of God, and its advance in men’s hearts. You will no doubt have to bear in silence untold internal trials; your soul will be plunged in sadness; but the agony of the Saviour did not avail less than His preaching for the salvation of the world. His prayer was, according to many interpreters, that His bitter chalice might pass from His lips to the lips of the Apostles, and of all who should carry on the apostolic work. I think, then, that if we take faith for guide, we must not fear that humiliations will render our ministry less effective; they will, on the contrary, cause more abundant fruits of salvation to be produced. It is not for nothing that we are said to be members of the Society of Jesus; the more suffering we endure with Him, like Him, and for His sake, the more fully shall we share His work of Saviour. Farewell, dear Father; the force of a friendship which unites souls together in the Lord is nowhere better felt than in a time of common sorrow.”

F. Roothaan did not neglect to include in his prayers and in his gratitude the noble men, friends of F. de Ravignan and his brothers-in-arms, who, like him, had devoted themselves to the defence of our Society, and of religious liberty. He wrote in this spirit:—

“I commission you to express my feelings to the Abbé Dupanloup, M. Vatimesnil, M. de Montalembert, M. de Barthélemy, M. Beugnot, and M. Berryer. In the name of the whole Society, I assure them of my gratitude. In looking through our annals, we can, it is true, find some instances of a like devotedness; but I know of none which surpass these. I pray to the Author of all good, Who alone could have inspired the heroic courage

with which, in the evil days, they have defended our cause and that of the Church, to supply what we cannot give, and to shower down upon them His choicest blessings in abundance."

Close as were the ties binding these six eminent men with F. de Ravignan, it was no mere personal affection that led them to take part in our quarrel; the principle on which they were attached to our cause was higher, the object wider; they became champions of the Society that they might be soldiers of the Church. Moreover, misfortune stirs good hearts to compassion, and injustice rouses the devotion of great souls. To show the true character of these Catholic friendships, we will quote, with some abridgment, two of the answers returned to F. Roothaan's expression of gratitude; they are both addressed to F. de Ravignan:—

"MY VERY DEAR AND HONOURED FRIEND,—
The noble affectionateness of your own heart deceives you as to my character. There is nothing in me to admire but the abundance of graces which God has granted me. The first of all these is, I think, that He has given me a love for the Church, at a time when so many believers either do not know or refuse to acknowledge the Spouse of Jesus Christ. This love is my happiness, my glory, and my strength; but it is also my only merit. Believe me, my honoured friend, for I say it to you with all sincerity, your friendship towards me is an abundant and glorious recompense; it is so much the greater honour to me as I do not deserve it in the sight of men, and it will help me before God.

"You know how much I love your Society. I love it, first, because the Church loves it, and then because it is distinguished by the honour of being an especial object of hatred to the enemies of Catholicity. I do not see that there possibly can

be clearer marks of the favour of God. Farewell, and thanks, my honoured and affectionate friend."

We will give another of the replies addressed to F. de Ravignan :—

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have again and again read your kind letter ; I shall preserve it as a valuable pledge of your attachment, and of the regard with which I am honoured by your Fathers. Be so good as to convey my acknowledgments to your respected and excellent General. His kindness and his prayers for me affect me deeply, and fill me with gratitude. My dear friend, you make far too much of my poor services. What are they compared with what you and yours have done for Christian society ? How feeble in comparison are we—men of the world, lawyers, authors, politicians, publicists, speakers, and the rest—who have no merit but a little thought and toil in imparting our ideas to the public ! Hence I conclude, on the one hand, that your kindness gives me my only title to your gratitude, and on the other, that I have great need of the prayers which F. Roothaan is good enough to offer for me. Therefore, I beg prayers of him, of you, and of the whole Society.

"You consider 'whether you are secure,' and you declare that 'you doubt it much.' I too doubt it myself. You cannot be secure as long as the French Ministry is insecure ; it will have to comply with the will of the party which it dreads. . . . Wait, be firm, prudent, and patient ; liberty of conscience awaits us in the future. It will triumph amongst us. Meantime you have some trials to endure, but they will come to an end. So marked is the tendency of opinion towards this liberty, that your adversaries themselves are forced to use it as their mask, and to represent you as desirous

of enthralling it. An absurd calumny, sufficiently refuted by the fact of the events now going on in Switzerland.

“Even if, as you say, some of the Bishops are for the moment losing courage in their support of you, I trust that this feeling will not last long. There is this difference between actions done in compliance with human views and those which arise from Christian views, that the hope of success is the main-spring of the one, while the others are brought about by the idea of duty. *Even if* is one of the most Catholic expressions I know.

“Farewell, my dear friend ; I wish I could say *à Dieu*—God be with you—as well as you can say it ; but there are some expressions, the use of which is the privilege of particular tongues and of particular pens. For myself, I am satisfied with wishing you farewell with all affection and goodwill.”

Devotedness to the Society, then, was not wanting ; the greatest talents, joined with the most undoubted virtue, fought in its defence. If after this it were to be worsted in the combat, the defeat would not be without some degree of honour.

The need of combined action soon became evident ; and it seemed necessary to form at Paris a Catholic Committee for the defence of the Church. The outlines of the scheme are due to the Count de Montalembert ; F. de Ravignan put them into shape in the month of June 1844. But the course of events was more rapid than the plans of defence.

But before the final catastrophe there was a suspension of arms. While the Peers and Deputies were enjoying the parliamentary recess, F. de Ravignan had need of his own holiday. To watch him during this critical period, when he was at

once an apostle and a soldier, as he perpetually and without rest passed and repassed between the pulpit and the battle-field, it might have been supposed that his great soul, never ceasing to be mistress of herself, was at ease in the midst of storm and tempest. However, he felt a constant and religious inclination towards solitude, and he stayed in the great city where iniquity and contradiction abounded, only because he thus promoted the greater glory of God. When, then, he had discharged his duty, there was no cause for delaying his departure. There is something beautiful in this regular alternation, in which the whole life of F. de Ravignan is comprised—this sort of coming and going between heaven and earth which he himself so well described as the point of leaving God, and the point of reaching God again. He was seen in turn climbing the mountain alone, like Moses, entering into the cloud, plunging and disappearing in the depths of the Divine Being; then, after a certain time, as punctual in his return as he had been prompt to leave, appearing again among the children of men, with peace on his features, and full of new strength for new combats.

This year (1844) F. de Ravignan determined to retire as far as possible, and to shake off every remembrance of Paris. Passing by Lyons he followed the right bank of the Rhone, and sought the wild solitudes of the Vivarais. In a retired part of the valley, on a small eminence, protected by a circular rampart of mountains, and with a torrent flowing at its foot, there rises a beautiful chapel of the Blessed Virgin, and, close by, an old house, a mere ruin, put into sufficient repair to be just habitable. From this spot scarcely anything but sky can be seen, except where one little spot discloses on the horizon a chain of mountains bounding a rugged country, and on the highest

point of which the tower of Louvesc is visible in clear weather ; the spot is called Our Lady of Ay. The noble and munificent Montravel family had made over to the Jesuits the use of the old domain, on condition of maintaining the church, and of providing for the spiritual wants of the pilgrims. Our Lady of Ay was at this time a house for the Third Probation. It seemed every way to suit F. de Ravignan as a place for following the Exercises, and once again he was able to write, "My soul has benefited by the Retreat."

He then went to Louvesc to celebrate, on June 16, the feast of St Francis Regis beside his tomb, of which an altar has been formed. His thoughts here reverted to his good friend, M. Gossin, the founder of the Institution of St Francis Regis, and who had just been elected President of the Society of St Vincent of Paul. He wrote to him from Louvesc at this time :—

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—The period of my retreat kept me in retirement at Our Lady of Ay until this very morning. Before daybreak I was on the road to climb to the tomb of our holy Apostle, and I have just offered Mass at his tomb for all your intentions, which are so pleasing to God. Miserable and unworthy as I am of such a commission, I have made an offering of the renewal of your vow, and of the whole Institution of St Francis, which has been made fruitful by so many blessings from heaven. . . . Yes, you have done well to accept the presidency of the Society of St Vincent of Paul. God will be your support.

"What a comfort there is in rendering honour to the Saints ! But what a reckoning awaits us if we are members of the same Society with St Francis Regis !"

At length, F. de Ravignan reached our Seminary at the Vals, the last point of his journey. He informed his Paris Superior of his arrival in these words:—"I reached this place on the eve of St Aloysius; it suits me wonderfully well. I am much affected and edified by the young men, of whom there are so many here. My time is wholly employed in preparing my Conferences for next Lent. When this is done I will, by God's help, set about a work which may prove more profitable for the cause of truth, justice, and liberty."

For the Lent of 1845 he chose a subject which bore upon the posture of affairs; the struggles of Catholicism in every age of history formed the topic of all his Conferences.

The other work to which he alludes, and for which he asks for prayers, was a new, general, and complete Apology for the Society, not directed against the fabricators of romances, the dealers in insults and absurdities. Silence is the only reply which should ever be made to men of this class; and the works themselves will in the eyes of posterity be the severest penalty that could be paid by their authors. But a reply was needed to some other works of a graver cast, wherein new life was given to old lies a hundred times refuted, especially to such as procured currency for falsehood and hate by an appearance of moderation; such as was, for example, M. de Saint-Priest's book on the Fall of the Jesuits, which gained from a competent lady critic the witty remark, "Sir, you have done all in your power to win for yourself the semblance of impartiality, and to prevent your reader being impartial." F. de Ravignan's design was to give in this work the completion of his tract of the preceding year, and the authorities for it. The plan was already arranged, the materials

collected ; time for carrying it out alone was wanting.

About the same time, he took up another work in favour of the liberty of the Church. This treatise was never finished ; but some fragments were afterwards published in the form of articles in the *Ami de la Religion*.

The religious found peace and quiet in solitude. If certain persons in high places had had their way, he would have been deprived of his well-occupied leisure. Was the eye of the police upon him that he was to be pursued from Paris to Vals ? The Minister was deceived by false reports, and wrote letter upon letter respecting the house which had come under suspicion, respecting the stay in it of F. de Ravignan, who, of course, gave cause of uneasiness for the future safety of the commonwealth. Yet the supposed conspirator was very far from allowing himself to be disturbed :—"It is all mere trumpery," he wrote, "hindrances put in our way out of hate, and by persons of the lowest orders. Prefect and Bishop and every one have laughed and ridiculed the wretched informers, and given most gracious answers ; and that is all—*prætereaque nihil*."

The Keeper of the Seals, from his place in the Chamber of Peers, had denounced the unfortunate Jesuits who were so audacious as to hold property, and so weak as to allow themselves to be robbed. The matter in hand was a breach of trust committed in the course of 1844 by the notorious Affnaër. The Minister was answered with spirit by the Count de Beugnot. But the business was coming before the Courts, and our friends feared evil from its drawing attention. Two countesses, distinguished alike for rank and piety, wrote on the subject to F. de Ravignan, who returned them this answer from Vals :—

"I beg you to conceive the same confidence on our behalf that we ourselves feel. God is still sending us severe trials. A great misfortune has happened to us in Paris. A sum of money has been taken from us, the joint property of four or five provinces of the Society, a considerable amount in the whole, though not much for each. We had put confidence in a certain layman, and he has abused our trust. We have given no offence to God, and are therefore at ease. These eight thousand pounds were invested in different public stocks, and belonged to our Swiss, Spanish, Lyons, and Paris provinces, and to Belgium, too, I think. The money was destined for our missions in America, Syria, India, China, ... and for the extraordinary necessities of nearly fifteen hundred religious. It is all gone. . . . But what matters it? we have God still. We shall tell the truth; what others say will pass away. The love of God will never be taken from us. Let things take their course; let the money be lost to us. Providence rules all. Let our aim be abandonment of self to God in all simplicity."

F. de Ravignan begged of his Provincial, F. Rubillon, the favour of being excused attendance at the Provincial Congregation which meets every three years, and which was to be held in Paris in the course of August. He laid before his Superior, as he said, a humble desire of his soul: "Everything will go on the better; I shall come back to you less imperfect, as I trust, and having finished some work. Get me this grace from God, and you will have done one good work the more. It is understood that if our dear Society meets with any fresh difficulties on the part of the Minister, I will come to Paris immediately."

His request was not granted. Let us see how he bore a rebuff: "The time has come," he wrote

to the Provincial before starting to join the Congregation—"the time has come when I shall be with you again; but I wish to say beforehand that I find in it a real comfort. The love of retirement and of quiet labour was like a weight detaining me among these dear mountains; solitude and peace around me was a sensible need of my soul; but the will of God is better still; and I return to Paris with joy for at least some days."

Accordingly he reached Paris on the 20th of August, took part in the Provincial Congregation, returned at once to Vals, and on the 1st of September, wrote to F. Rubillon a letter of thanks and of self-accusation—

"I feel in my heart a need of writing to you, and repeating to you again that my soul is full of feelings of respect, esteem, and true brotherly love for you and for all our fathers. I dreaded the Congregation; I always fear large meetings, and I tried to escape it. There is not always sufficient moderation in my language; the reason is, my entire want of humility. You again excused me, and judged kindly of what my intentions were at bottom. You ought to find nothing but consolation in this meeting at Paris.

"After fifty hours spent on the road, at last I reached our dear house at Vals. Again I find here deep peace, and a leisure in which I am free to work. I take every pains, you may be sure, to use it profitably."

F. de Ravignan was to give the Advent-station of 1844 at Toulouse; and in the repose of prayer and study he awaited the opening of the new campaign. At the end of November, he left his beloved mountains, first visited Toulouse, and, having concluded the station, returned to Paris in the course of January 1845.

The Jesuit must have crossed, on his road, a

diplomatist who was also travelling, but with very different objects. M. Rossi left Paris for Rome, charged by the French Government with an extraordinary mission to the Government of the Pope. To what did it relate? Not a word was yet known; but there was nothing which it might not be feared time would bring forth. We had no ground for hope in men, and the mystery attending the mission was alone enough to arouse suspicion.

As the time approached when it was hoped that a decisive blow would be struck, it was easy to observe that insults, and even threats, became more violent. The government allowed this, in order to try the effect of intimidation. To save the trouble of sending the Jesuits away, it was wished to make them desirous to go. They did not go. On the 1st of May, the eve of the day fixed for putting some questions in the legislature, the commotion became more threatening. Warnings were sent in thick; there was reason, our friends feared, to anticipate an outbreak, an attack by the students, the pillage of the Jesuits' houses. F. de Ravignan did nothing but inform the chief police officer of the Quarter of the Observatory. This functionary took the orders of the Prefect of Police, and answered in the kindest manner that every attempt at disorder would be immediately put down if the authorities had been unsuccessful in anticipating it; that he would himself remain the whole day at his office, to be at the service of F. de Ravignan.

On the 2d of May were put those much-talked-of questions, the issue of which was known beforehand. F. de Ravignan, in the company of the Abbé Dupanloup, was present at the mournful spectacle which the Palais Bourbon presented. The figure so often seen in the pulpit of Notre-Dame might have been recognised in the ambassadors' gallery; nor was any emotion visible on that coun-

tenance when the house in which he dwelt was stigmatised as a *public pestilence, which the government would fail in its duty by allowing to remain.*

M. Berryer was to reply on the following day. Early in the morning, F. de Ravignan visited the Rue Neuve des Petits-Champs. The great orator was walking up and down his room, preparing for the struggle of the day. F. de Ravignan fell on his neck, thanked him for the service he was about to perform, and encouraged him by the hope of a reward in heaven rather than of success on earth.

"Our cause is hopeless, beyond doubt," was the reply; "but yet we shall win. For the present I am in despair. I have before me the sight of all these party men, their minds already made up, and as immovable as a wall of marble to all my efforts. It is only that I am unworthy to be the advocate of so noble a cause: let me not have your thanks, but your prayers."

Everything happened as had been foreseen. M. Berryer was what he always is, eloquent; but the Chamber was resolved to go farther; and a vote of proscription had the support of the majority. The minister was forced to speak decidedly, and announced that his foresight had led him already to begin diplomatic negotiations with the Holy Father; and that, should these fail, he would have recourse to the action of the executive.

On the Jesuits' side it was resolved, in case force were used, to hold out to the last, and, if need arose, to appeal from violence to the Courts of Justice. An opinion was published at this time, under the hands of lawyers and advocates practising in all the Courts of the kingdom, declaring the illegality of the arbitrary resolution of the Chambers:

"Any action of the Executive would be in flagrant opposition to the sanction given by the Charter and the Law to the liberty of individuals, to

the sacredness of dwelling-houses, and of the rights of property, and to the freedom of conscience and of worship. If the existence of exceptional laws was set up, the Courts alone would be able to determine whether these laws were still in force, and, if so, to put them in action. According to our public law and civil legislation, the agents of the Executive have no authority to cut short questions of this nature, which belong exclusively to magistrates, who are secured in independence and in possession of their offices."

F. de Ravignan drew up two circulars to the same effect which were sent, in the name of the Provincials, to all the Superiors of our houses in France. The first detailed the course of conduct to be observed in the existing emergency; whatever could attract attention was to be avoided, and all irritating opposition; moderation and civility were to be joined with firmness; nothing short of force was to induce us to withdraw. The second was a form of protest, in case of infraction of the freedom of our dwelling-house, to be entered on the public minutes, and to be published in the newspapers. I will content myself with quoting the opening and the conclusion:—

"We conceive ourselves to be fulfilling a sacred duty as priests, as religious, and as Frenchmen, when we protest against the act of violence which compels us to leave our common dwelling-house, where our life was employed in serving God, the Church, and our brethren in the spiritual ministry, under episcopal control. If we could have supposed that the present struggle concerned ourselves only, and that our dispersion would calm men's minds and advance the good of the Church and the maintenance of her rights, we would by our own act have anticipated the act of the authorities; we would have given up our dearest attachments, the loudest calls of our

hearts, and submitted of our own free will, while we awaited better days, to sacrifice our most valued rights, the advantages and benefits of a life in common. We would have parted by our own choice, although our voluntary submission could never break the sacred bonds by which we are united, which have a strength and duration beyond what any power of man may avail to break.

“But the principle which places so terrible and arbitrary a power in the hands of the Executive is equally applicable to all religious congregations. This discretionary execution of alleged laws of police places at the command of a single man, of a few men, without form of trial, argument, responsibility or chance of appeal, the fate, the existence, the future of a multitude of souls; souls which by perpetual vows have consecrated to God in religious life all their exertions, their zeal, their hopes, and their destiny hereafter.

“This is to make what the Catholic Church has solemnly instituted the Religious Orders which it has approved, depend solely on the passing bent of opinion, on the chances of passion, on party feelings or interests, which too often beset the Government and lead it astray, and influence it in the use of this power of destruction which so ill suits a land of liberty.

“We are Frenchmen, in enjoyment of the liberty belonging to this city, and we call for support in upholding that Law which is the property of us all; and with all the energy which a good conscience and the deepest conviction can inspire, we protest against this unheard-of violation of religious liberty and of the surest guarantees of the liberty given us by the Constitution. . . .

“The parties hereto therefore declare that they yielded only to force, and they expressly reserve all their rights against all whom it may concern, to

be prosecuted in such manner as they shall think fit.

“They cannot believe that, in a free country, senseless clamour and the calumnies which have been heaped upon their name, although no individual has been accused, no crime charged against them, no circumstance formally stated, will be enough to bring about the expulsion and proscription of religious, of priests, of Frenchmen, the equals before the Law of all their countrymen.

“They have not fallen into such utter despair of the Government of their country, of the good sense of the public, nor of the cause of civil, political, and religious liberty.”

While the Jesuits and their Catholic champions were convinced that there was nothing to fear on the side of Rome, and were preparing for the struggle on the ground of the Law, the Government sought to escape the odium of the violent measures to which it would be driven, and were assiduous in pressing the matter at the Court of the Sovereign Pontiff, trusting that the Papal authority would deliver them from their difficulty. This was the object of the mission of M. Rossi, whose skill and assiduity were well known. In the course of his intrigues he tried threats and promises by turn, but finding himself coldly received, he finally forced Gregory XVI. to take into consideration a note in which he demanded, in the name of his Government, that the Papal authority should intervene to close the houses of the French Jesuits, break up their Noviciates, and force them to join the ranks of the secular clergy. The Holy Father accordingly summoned what is called the Congregation of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Business, which consists of the Cardinals: he presided in person, and the venerable assembly came to a unanimous decision that it was not within the power of the Holy See to grant what was demanded,

nor could it be consistent with its duty to do so. M. Rossi being thus foiled, saw clearly that nothing could be gained from the Vatican, and turned his thoughts towards the Gesù. At his suggestion a message was sent by Gregory XVI. to the General, to the effect that, for the sake of peace, it would be prudent for him spontaneously to grant what could not be forced from him, and to yield to the French Government all possible concessions which he might judge suitable to withdraw them from the evil course on which they had entered.

As early as the 14th of June, F. Roothaan addressed a letter to the Provincials of Paris and Lyons, informing them of the decision of the congregation, which left French diplomacy without hope, and adding, that perhaps it would be necessary for something to be done to calm the excitement which the answer of Rome was sure to produce; that he put no command upon them, but proposed either the reduction in numbers or the dissolution of the houses at Paris, Lyons, and Avignon. The letter concluded as follows:—"It costs me much to take such a step, but I deem it my duty to suggest this prudential measure. I hope that it can be carried out quietly, and as I just now said, without drawing attention; this would be very much better, whether looked at spiritually or temporally, than if it had to be done later in the midst of tumult." In a second letter dated on the 21st, the General repeated his advice of the previous week as to reducing or dissolving the three houses, and added that it would be good to adopt the same course with regard to the other larger houses, especially Saint-Acheul and some of the Noviciates. "We must," he said, "try as far we can to withdraw ourselves a little from notice, and thus pay the due penalty for the excessive confidence which we placed in the specious pro-

mise of a liberty which we find in the Charter and in the Charter alone."

On the day before the latter of these letters left Rome, and before the earlier reached Paris, F. de Ravignan sent the following declaration to M. de Salvandy:—"I have not forgotten the kindness you showed in your conversation with me, for which I continue grateful. The thought of your kind and generous words could not fail to give me comfort; I shall always regard them as the expression of the perfect and scrupulous impartiality which guides your conduct, and which must ever command my confidence.

"I do not now take the liberty of writing to you merely to occupy your valuable time, nor to engage your interest in a cause which I have so much at heart. But I have thought that you will allow me, with all respect, to make a remark on the impression which you may retain from our interview. A person tells me that he heard from your own mouth, that when with you I seemed to express an opinion that we should ourselves consent to the dismissal of our young novices. No doubt I expressed myself badly, and perhaps I did not think there was urgent need to protest against an idea which, as I hope, you did not and do not entertain; which, I may in all sincerity assure you, has never been held by me nor by those with whom I act. And now, seeing the attitude taken by the Keeper of the Seals, we are less disposed than ever to give up voluntarily any single point. We agree with the lawyers and political men who have undertaken our cause, and who support us in our struggle, that no distinction can legally be made between our Noviciates and our other Houses; and we give up nothing of the right secured to us by Law of living together as religious, whether novices or priests, whether in small communities or in large.

“Excuse my giving this explanation ; your high-minded candour will be glad that an impression should be effaced which my words ought never to have produced, and which then was, and still is, opposed to the real state of our ideas and convictions. It gives me much grief to reflect that the Government of my country is forced to acknowledge itself overcome by groundless clamour and prejudice.”

Meantime the advice of F. General became known in France, and caused the utmost embarrassment to the Superiors ; for they took a view of their position different from what was taken at Rome, and no actual command had been laid upon them. F. Rubillon, the Paris Provincial, started on July 3, after an interview with the Provincial of Lyons, for the purpose of discussing the business orally with F. Roothaan, and he took with him a tolerably full account of the position of affairs, the work of F. de Ravignan. It contained, among other things, this passage : “Negotiation with the Government, and some sort of compromise ; or, on the other hand, resistance by the assistance of the Law, as suggested in the Counsel’s opinion : such are the two courses between which your wise care for us must make choice. I should prefer, for the honour of the Holy See, for the honour of the Society, in defence of the rights and liberties of the Church, that we have recourse to calm, dignified, legal resistance.

“An open struggle is going on in France ; an attempt is being made to enslave the Church by the aid of hostile legal action and the Organic Articles. No true liberty is allowed to Religion. The Government is too weak : the majorities in the Chambers are too wanting in religious feeling and liberality to grant anything with a good will. But one means is left : resistance by legal means,

grounded on our constitutional rights. Look again at the argument of M. Vatimesnil, and at the speeches of MM. Beugnot, Barthélemy, and Montalembert. If you had, like me, often seen and conversed with these four men, the judgment formed at Rome on the posture of affairs would perhaps undergo a change. . . . Why should the Society decline to enter on the contest at present? She has never shunned it. And it is the opinion of reliable judges that violence on the part of the Government, argument and legal penalties, would cause a decided reaction in our favour.

“It is said that by breaking up some houses, by dispersing in this or that town, we should calm the excitement, give Government an opportunity of escaping from the business, and satisfy public opinion. I have the fullest conviction that all this is a mistake; half-measures will do nothing towards allaying the storm; the fury of the opposition will continue; we should have incessantly to begin afresh, incessantly to withdraw again. All agree that the indecision of the Pilates of our day has placed the Society in a position which can no longer be endured.”

While the Holy See refused to grant anything to M. Rossi, and the French Jesuits were making representations to their General, from whom they had received no orders, and who was waiting for their answer to his recommendations, the French Government caused the following paragraph to be inserted in the *Moniteur* of July 6, it having previously appeared in the *Messenger*:—“The King’s Government has received despatches from Rome. The negotiation with which M. Rossi was charged has proved successful. The Jesuit association will cease to exist in France, and is about to disperse voluntarily. Its houses will be closed, and its Noviciates broken up.”

Then followed hours full of anguish for the French Jesuits and their friends. How was the announcement to be explained, so unlooked-for, yet so positive—so sudden a surrender after a resistance so prolonged? But almost directly after the appearance of this formidable paragraph, a letter, dated on June 28, arrived from Rome, which explained the puzzle in the manner which F. de Ravignan and the other French Jesuits had already guessed. This letter was written by F. Rozaven, the Assistant for France, and contained the following passage:—

“I suppose you already know that M. Rossi’s mission has failed completely. The Secretary of Legation left some days since to carry the *ultimatum* to Paris. Rumours will perhaps be circulated that the Holy See has made some concessions; but do not believe them. The clever diplomatist has not succeeded in gaining anything either by artifice or menace. Yet we must do him the justice to say, that he has used every means in his power to create an impression that in this business his Government is actuated by a genuine anxiety for promoting the interests of religion, and to depict the frightful consequences to the Church and the Holy Father which will follow the refusal of the Pontifical Government to enter into the views of the Government of France. But all has been of no avail, and he has gained nothing, absolutely nothing. . . .

“The French Legation and its friends have set afloat a rumour in Rome that F. General has given an order to close our Noviciates in France, and to quit our other houses. You know that this is unfounded. It is merely a trick of M. Rossi to hide his disappointment. No doubt you will hear other falsehoods.”

As soon as the paragraph in the *Moniteur* became known at Rome, no less astonishment was

felt there than at Paris, and certainly the greatest surprise was felt by those whose names were involved—the Holy Father himself, and Cardinal Lambruschini, the Secretary of State. M. Rossi was called upon for an explanation. The Envoy Extraordinary seemed astonished, and replied that he had never written anything of the kind ; and he remarked that the passage was not in the official part of the *Moniteur* ; it was a mere newspaper paragraph, to which no importance should be attached. He would however write to his Government to have the mistake set right. He spoke to this effect to the Cardinal Secretary and to several members of the diplomatic body.

I have before me a despatch of the Cardinal Secretary to the Nuncio Apostolic at Paris, dated August 4, 1845, in which, after referring to and confirming the previous despatches of June 28 and July 11, he adds that the reply always given to the French envoy had been that F. Roothaan would take the steps that prudence dictated to get over the difficulty ; but that it was impossible for the Holy Father to interfere, and that the answer of the Holy See to every demand of the kind by the French Government would be, of course, civil in form, but in substance a refusal. The Cardinal concluded :—

“As regards the extent of the measures to be adopted, there has never been any question of the Jesuits giving up their property or disposing of it, giving up their houses, or ceasing to exist in France ; and when, after reading the ministerial paragraph, I represented the matter to M. Rossi, he answered distinctly that he had not written to this effect. Persons who believe that they possess good information assert, moreover, that M. Rossi has indirectly given the General of the Jesuits to understand that the paragraph must not be taken literally.

“Your Excellency may say, by way of advice to

the Jesuits, that they can confine themselves to what shall be prescribed by their General; they are not at all bound to go beyond the instructions of their Superior."

Meantime, on July 10, the Comte de Beugnot presented to the Minister of Foreign Affairs a note by F. de Ravignan declaring what might and ought to be the conduct of the Jesuits in France in accordance with the instructions received from their General. It concluded:—"It must be understood that if the religious of the Society yield anything, they do so for the sake of peace; they expressly reserve all their rights, which they will enforce whenever they think proper; that is to say, they in no sense give up their right when the occasion happens of claiming the benefit of the Constitution, and of the general law of property, of residence, of individual liberty and religious liberty. It is to be understood also that if the Government now demand of the Jesuits more than has been granted by their General, recourse will necessarily be had to legal argument and resistance."

The day after this interview, which had no favourable result, F. de Ravignan informed F. Roothaan that M. Guizot maintained the truthfulness of the paragraph in the *Moniteur*, which M. Rossi had sent, and that he formally declared that the Government was prepared to uphold it, and to put it in execution literally and in its full extent; that, consequently, all the houses of the Society in France, without exception, would be closed; at the most three Jesuits would be allowed to live together; the Noviciates would be broken up altogether; the Chambers might possibly consent to a single Noviciate being maintained for the purposes of the foreign missions, but that the existence in France of Jesuits as an association must cease until the arrival of better times.

F. de Ravignan did not question the good faith of the Minister, who had no doubt been deceived by the Ambassador, but the uselessness of the sacrifices which the Society had been ready to make moved him to exclaim, "All the champions of the Catholic cause are in consternation. We lift our eyes and hands to God. Were my opinion asked, I should repeat what I recommended before: Continue the struggle by legal resistance in the name of the common right and of liberty.

"But if it come to the worst, I shall bow my head in silence beneath the yoke. My soul is full of sorrow; I can scarcely think or act. How happy I should be if your paternity would send me away from France, or at least from Paris, for a year or two of thorough retirement. But excuse me; however deep my sorrow, my wish is, that my obedience be constant and entire."

On the 28th of the same month, F. Rozaven, who was also inclined towards the course of legal resistance, should the Government proceed to violence, wrote to the Comte de Montalembert: "Our enemies say that they will never be satisfied except by our ceasing to exist. Any other concession would be useless and illusory, serving only to compromise the honour of the Holy See, which is dearer to us than our own existence. We will follow the example of M. Martin, who has folded his arms, waiting for us to do something. Let us, too, fold our arms, and wait for him. A would-be assassin ought not to want the courage to strike the blow: it is too much to beg the victim himself to do the deed, to save the other the trouble. . . . We are repeatedly told that our cause is not the cause of the Church; we know this very very well, but we also know that the Church's cause is essentially ours,—that we were brought into being to

defend the Church, that we exist for this alone, and that we ought to be ready to sacrifice our very lives for this cause. We know too that it is the interest of the Church to protect its born champions; and we have the comfort of knowing that the excellent Pontiff, who now occupies the chair of St Peter, is thoroughly convinced that to protect the Society is a duty laid upon him in which he will never fail; of this we have assurance in the answer which he gave to a French Bishop, ‘*Huic nostro pastoralis muneri nunquam defuimus, nunquam deerimus,*’—‘In this our pastoral office, We never have failed, We never will fail.’”

It would be impossible to tell all that F. de Ravignan suffered during these miserable debates, and especially at their issue, which seemed to be the victory of the enemies of the Church, and to give a triumph to injustice and falsehood. He would have accepted robbery and banishment with joy, had he been overcome fighting, arms in hand, in defence of his Society and of the Church. As early as 1844, when M. Martin had called upon us to dismiss our Novices, he wrote to one of his old colleagues, at that time a Chief Clerk in the office of the Minister of Worship: “We should prefer to have the question settled once for all: if we are condemned and again proscribed, we shall go and seek shelter among the savages of America, or with the heathen of India and China. We shall there have more liberty.” But this energetic soul could not feel resignation when he saw the Society, by its own act, complying with the desires of a tyrannical Government which aimed at its destruction; when he saw the honour of the Holy See compromised by signs of weakness over which the infidel newspapers rejoiced; when he saw how discouraged were his generous friends who were still eager to carry on the fight, and assured him in the

name of the Law that resistance would be successful. To the last he repeated in his letters to F. General: "I confess, to tell you the whole truth, that if any concessions be made to the Minister, on any point whatever, I shall not have courage to remain longer in Paris, nor to face those Peers of France Deputies and Advocates, who prepared, discussed, and approved the admirable argument of my friend M. Vatimesnil. In this I admit no feeling of self-love; I wish to consult exclusively the interests and honour of the Society." Nevertheless, forcible as his representations were, they were constantly followed by a yet more forcible expression of his religious and filial obedience. F. Roothaan found it necessary to soothe his sorrow by writing on the 7th of September:—

"I find that I must try to comfort you, and to find comfort for myself, now that our devotedness to the Holy See has led us to so great a sacrifice. The sacrifice is great, but it is also the very utmost. If the Government is not content with it, we will enforce our constitutional rights. I have conceded all that was in my power. I could not go farther without a formal order from the Sovereign Pontiff. Prayers, requests, solicitation, such as led me to these first concessions, will never induce me to go farther. Now, we have no reason to fear any such order, for the Holy Father has dispensed with the law of secrecy in the case of the Cardinals, who were present at the meeting of the Congregation of Ecclesiastical Business on June 12, and has taken this means of giving publicity to the decision come to respecting us; for Rome does not change from day to day, and never changes her decisions while the circumstances remain unchanged.

"It is therefore of the greatest importance to maintain our own courage and that of our friends. The Lord will not allow that this course should

prove our ruin, when the Sovereign Pontiff suggested and advised it with a view to peace, and when we adopted it with the same view, but chiefly on account of our devotion to the Holy See. I hope that the many zealous champions whom you have gained to the Society, among persons in the highest ranks and of the greatest influence, will continue to uphold our cause, especially when they are informed of the real course of events.

“When there is a question of obedience, and we would act up to it, St Ignatius teaches us not to wait for a formal precept. Prudence belongs not to him that obeys, but to him that commands. However, my good Father, I do not believe that we must put much trust in the goodness of our cause, of our rights, or of our arguments. But, *Have confidence*, says our Lord, *I have overcome the world*, and our victory is no less sure.”

Two days before this letter left Rome to give comfort to F. de Ravignan, he had himself sent from Paris to the General the following testimony of his obedience, and of that of the French Jesuits :

“The Superiors will faithfully carry out the instructions they have received from your Paternity; we are all bound to accept them in letter and in spirit; and we know too well how much you have suffered to make any addition to the pain and difficulty of your anxious position. Under existing circumstances, we must so act that all the marks of loyal submission may be seen in our conduct, and that every impartial man may be able, when he has read your letters, to aver that they have been executed faithfully.”

Accordingly, every point of the instructions contained in the note given to the Minister was attended to: the changes, both in persons and places, were carried into effect without notice and without protest. All the uproar aroused about

the Jesuits was calm in one instant: it was clear that if the hatred of many was deep and their terror real, the anger of almost all was only on the surface and artificial; and that the attempt to hinder the existence of the Jesuits in France was chiefly designed to prevent them teaching. The Government congratulated itself on being out of the difficulty, on having concealed feebleness under a semblance of strength, and on having given to a defeat the appearance of victory; but just as the cry was then, Down with the Jesuits! a little less than three years afterwards the cry was raised, Down with the Ministers! and with the Ministers the throne fell and was seen no more.

Among all the sorrows which Providence allotted to F. de Ravignan, in the course of this year, so prolific for him in trials, we have as yet said nothing of that which he found most bitter. This apostolic man, this priest so devoted to the Church, who, with the sincere humility befitting his calling, professed so profound a veneration, such scrupulous deference for the hierarchy, had to lament a serious difficulty, which interrupted the course of his communications with the Archbishop of Paris, and some misunderstandings between the Society itself and the Diocesan. The fault was in the times. The Archbishop found himself embarrassed between Rome and Paris; the Jesuits between the requirements of the Bishop and their rights. In so difficult a conjuncture, mistake and offence were sure to be found. Providence allowed it to be so. I would not utter one murmur against a Bishop who fell a sacrifice to devotion to his people. Whatever he did, beyond all doubt he deemed it his duty to do. Had not so much been said of these wretched jars, I should never myself have spoken of them. In the first place, Mgr. Affre felt a dislike of the connexion which notoriously existed

between F. de Ravignan and certain priests and laymen, whom he looked on as opposed to his administration, and he made repeated attempts to break off this connexion. I do not hesitate to confess that the religious, well knowing what was his duty, and what it was in his power to do, while he never ceased to show respect and submission, resolved to remain ever faithful to his honourable and deserved attachments. He declared simply that he would never give up his friendships for fear or favour, just as, on the other hand, friendship should never lead him to forget his duty.

But far more serious difficulties soon arose to complicate the business. At the beginning of 1844, some influence was brought to bear on the Archbishop, who adopted several measures which struck a serious blow, not only at the privileges, but even at the existence, of a religious order recognised and approved by the Church. The Sovereign Pontiff was informed of the matter by the Nuncio, and by a Brief suspended the execution of the command. When, shortly after, the civil authorities, in their turn, began to speak of rigorous measures against the Jesuits, the Prelate seemed to recur to his old idea. Under these delicate circumstances, F. de Ravignan explained his position, while pouring out his afflicted heart into the bosom of the Archbishop. It would not be easy to express more grief with more respect.

“I feel called on to intrust to a letter, written under the influence of recollection and prayer, the inmost feelings of my soul in the midst of the distressing circumstances in which we are placed. My Lord, as priests, as religious approved by you for the exercise of the holy ministry in your diocese, we have, I think, endeavoured to act agreeably to the confidence with which you honoured us; we never could forget all that the hallowed obligations

of submission and gratitude required of us ; in spite of our weakness, our conscience finds nothing to reproach us with on this head.

“Be assured, your Grace, that we feel in our hearts more than a bare duty to remain in union with you ; we feel this to be our sincere desire, and our truest need : always remaining within the limits prescribed by the deepest veneration, we should rejoice, believe me, ever to maintain with your Grace those relations of filial trust, complete resignation, thorough openness of heart which are commonly found between our Fathers and their Lordships, the Bishops, under whom we have the honour of serving the Church.

“Your lofty position in the Episcopate, your learning, your courage, as well as the station we occupy in Paris, everything conspires to make us even more anxious for this perfect agreement of views and feeling between your Grace and ourselves. It would have seemed that, after the common Father of pastors and of all the faithful, the religious of the Society of Jesus, when persecuted in France with prejudice and hatred so bitter, ought to have found their surest support, their proper and most availing refuge in the Archbishop of Paris. Surely we need not fear to find ourselves deserted by you when our proscription and destruction are nigh at hand.

“At least, I throw myself at your Grace’s feet, begging this of you, respectfully and frankly ; attacked as we are on every side, threatened by the Government with vigorous proceedings, why have we seemed to hesitate in throwing ourselves into your arms, and pouring forth our grievances into your heart ? Why did we regard your Grace with something of painful suspense ? And why was it impossible for us not to notice that the existence and regular organisation of religious

orders, and of the Society of Jesus in particular, was the object in your mind of some involuntary feelings?

“Pardon me, again I beg your Grace, pardon me : God is my witness that I would not willingly speak a word, write a line, nor do any act which could give you pain or wound you. What a happiness, what a comfort, it would have been to us to feel, in the midst of the events now passing, that the heart which beat in the breast of our revered Archbishop was a heart which loved us ; how happy should we have been to find facility in keeping up the most intimate, familiar intercourse.

“For my own part, I avow it to my own confusion, in my own small share of the conduct of business, I have found myself arrested in the presence of an ill-defined but real obstacle.

“Pardon me once again : I am ashamed at my own boldness. I have thought it my duty to say this before I visit you ; it was a weight oppressing me ; now I have said it, and I earnestly beseech our divine Master and His holy Mother to open to us in your heart that blessed refuge of mutual affection, to fly to which is so necessary for us and so great a happiness.

“Perhaps your Grace would ask me how I came to have such a sense of the difficulties of our relations with you. I will give a humble explanation, without bitterness, without reserve, begging you to see nothing, hear nothing, but the description of the obstacle that stays our confidence, or rather the expression of it.

“It has seemed to us that after having in so noble and admirable a manner, abandoned into the hands of the Sovereign Pontiff, at a single word from him, the idea of making our ministry to some extent identical with that of the revered and exemplary parish clergy, you are now again inclining towards

something similar. You seemed to accept without sorrow or protest the demand of the Government for our dispersion and amalgamation with the secular clergy, while it is too clear to need proof that this would have been a violation of the sacred right of the priest, and even of the citizen, to live a religious life in community, and in observance of a rule approved by the Church. It seems at least that this plan, so full of sorrow for us, which threatened to crush our most cherished affections, habits, and obligations, failed to arouse in your mind, so full of projects for good, any thought of helping us, any feeling of compassion for our sorrows and our necessities.

"I would hope that your Grace does not think that this is meant to convey even the shadow of a reproach; there is in it no matter of reproach. Such was the way in which you looked at the matter, it was not, could not be, our way. I merely explain to you one of the grounds of the decay of our hopes.

"Men in misery are, it may be, sometimes too sensitive and too exacting; such has certainly been our situation. We beg your pardon for it, for our hearts have been filled with sorrow.

"It is enough, I think, to explain to your Grace my own impressions and those of some of my Brethren. You have had interviews with the two Provincials; they bear the burden and responsibility of twenty-seven houses of our Order, scattered through twenty-four dioceses: this is the same as telling you that they must adopt a uniform course, following in every point the instructions received from Rome, and at the same time endeavouring to comply with the wishes, expressed or presumed, of the greater number of Bishops. Our Superiors will, I am convinced, be able, by God's help, to carry this out when the time shall come.

At the same time, they cannot forget the example given by St Paul, who, when imprisoned for the faith, claimed the rights of a citizen, and appealed to the Government that ruled the country. . . . But while they will show no lack of courage, they will never, you may rest assured, be found wanting in religious respect, and whatever else we owe to your Grace.

“You will also easily understand that we have no sort of communication with the temporal power on any subject which could have the appearance, immediately or remotely, of favouring our secularisation, and that nothing shall induce us to yield to its oppressive demands. As to this, the contest too nearly concerns the interests of God, our clearest rights, the rights of all religious congregations, the true advantage of the Church, her necessary and lawful independence, the simple wish to promote God’s glory and the good of souls, for us not to act in it with no less firmness than moderation.

“If after this your Grace again judge us deserving of your confidence, as I shall never cease to hope, if you deign to look on us as religious in canonical dependence on our regular superiors, if you continue to us our powers, we will preach and hear confessions with zeal and the strictest prudence.

“But if your Grace is prevented by circumstances from any longer giving us your support and confidence in Paris, if the position offered us should be inconsistent with our character as regular clergy, then we should with regret find ourselves forced to give up the honour and happiness of serving under your orders, and all acting together with the union of brothers, we should with all gratitude and respect lay at your feet the powers with which you have so long honoured us.

"This letter, my Lord, is long, too long. Be good enough to read it in the spirit in which it is written; you will see in it the expression of the fidelity, respect, and love the deepest and most tender, with which I have the honour to be, &c.,

"X. DE RAVIGNAN, S. J."

The venerable Prelate replied:—

"REVEREND FATHER,—I shall have much pleasure in seeing you, and I shall be very glad if I find that you are not under any prejudices such as you impute to me, and which I thank you for having informed me of. I venture to tell you that they have no existence, and that my conduct has not justified them. You know that the best friends are not always those who are freest in expressions of feeling, or who take most pains to conceal vexation.

"I will mention to you in all simplicity the last vexation I have suffered on the part of your Fathers. You are taking plenty of time in deciding on the course you will pursue, and you never communicate to me any of your plans. You will tell me all when I shall have little or no time to consider the matter. I do not refuse approval in the first instance to any proceeding, how bold soever it may appear; I ask only to discuss it, and then to come to a determination. I do not refuse to follow you, but I neither will nor can follow you blindly. I do not think that I have deserved this mistrust. You have consulted lawyers, and yet you have said nothing to me on a question in which there is really no legal question, so easy is it to settle, and in which the moral difficulties are everything.

"You are altogether mistaken as to my views on religious orders. I never expressed disapproval

of them. I do not think that a Catholic Bishop could allow himself to express such disapproval, nor even to indulge the secret feeling.

"As to yourself, Reverend Father, I should be exceedingly sorry if you gave up the ministry which you exercise in this city with so much fruit. I should also regret the loss of your other Fathers, who little think how great love and esteem I have for them. The complaints I have had occasion to address to them have not been those of an enemy; they spring from a heart which is certainly not indifferent to you, though I do not say that its affection amounts to a passion.—Your friend, entirely and devotedly,

"DENIS, Archbishop of Paris."

On receiving this letter, F. de Ravignan completed his explanation why the Jesuits could not altogether follow the course which the Prelate wished :—

"Your Lordship is quite right. Certainly you are not called on to take advice from us; we shall always ask your advice with respect and with every wish to follow it. But you will understand that in the important question which presses on us, we must also listen to the voices of a great number of Bishops, and of the Sovereign Pontiff himself; we must consider the general interests of the Church and those of our Society.

"Happen what may, we shall never fail in the respect and deep gratitude which is due from us to you."

Things being so, the Government interfered and took on itself to begin the use of harsh measures; it was so much the better both for the Archbishop and for the Jesuits.

Scarcely had three years elapsed when the good Shepherd mounted, an olive branch in his hand, on

the barricade of the Bastille, to purchase peace for France at the price of his life; and when he felt that his wound was mortal, he sent message after message to the Jesuits' residence. The Abbé Delage and the Abbé de la Bouillèrie, the present Bishop of Carcassonne, came successively to express the sorrow of the dying Prelate. It must be told of Mgr. Affre, that during his life he invariably sought to do right and to obey his conscience, but in his death his virtue advanced to the degree of heroism, and that, in truth, charity and humility converted his bier into a triumphal car.

As F. de Ravignan had taken a more prominent part in the struggle than the other Jesuits, he was the first to attract the attention of the authorities; and it was found necessary to insert the following paragraph relating to him in the note presented to the Minister on August 10:—

“As such seems to be the wish, F. de Ravignan will cease to reside at the Rue des Postes, but will still remain in Paris and continue his ministry.”

Such was the important measure required for the public safety!

Charity now contrasted strikingly with proscription; how many noble offers were then received, which shall not be forgotten! It had been necessary to give a written promise that we would not accept the hospitality which many of the Bishops offered us in their palaces. F. de Ravignan might have remained in Paris, though he left the Rue des Postes, but he was obliged to leave the city to prepare his approaching Conferences; nevertheless, under the circumstances prudence forbade his going to any great distance; he must seek a place of retirement, near enough for keeping up acquaintance with passing events, far enough to be removed from the turmoil of business. Both these characters belonged to an isolated country house, in

the middle of the old Royal Forest between Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Marly-le-Roi, close to the ruins, now scarcely perceptible, of the splendid villa of Louis XIV. In these deserted woods, amid silence no longer broken by the noise of the Court gaieties, he wrote his Conferences of 1846, the last which he was to deliver in Notre-Dame :—“Never shall I forget Marly,” he said afterwards ; “never can I forget it ; all that kindness and piety could suggest to truly Christian hearts was there done for me.” Before long, death visited the hospitable abode, and the Orator of Notre-Dame prayed at the grave of the noble mistress. The story of the life of F. de Ravignan shall preserve her name. The noblest name in France received lustre when linked with the exalted virtue of Mme. de Montmorency-Luxembourg.

The following lines were written by F. de Ravignan from Marly on Sept. 3, 1845, to the pious Countess Albert de la Ferronnays ; they breathe of the peace which possesses a soul resigned to the decrees of Heaven, and which rises superior to all things here below :—“The interest you take in our poor Society fills me with gratitude. At least, we find comfort from a few pious souls, in the midst of the storm of persecution and hate directed against us. We are not so conceited as to deem ourselves faultless ; many defects may be found in each one of us, as in every man if we know him well ; but I can never allow that the spirit which guides the Society, its Constitutions, its government, the chief facts in its history, deserve the reproaches heaped upon them. But you will understand that we have ceased to defend our reputation ; we leave this to God, if He judge it well for His greater glory. As far as I am concerned, no answer will be made to M. Gioberti nor any of the rest. You are kind enough to take great interest in our situa-

tion; receive with silence, let pass whatever is said against the Jesuits. Retain your kind esteem for them, and pray for them."

Two years later we shall find the same feelings expressed in another letter, also addressed to Mme. de la Ferronnays:—"You ask me what I think of Gioberti's *Gesuita Moderno*. I have just got through the enormous volume. I am sorry for the author; he has done us great harm in Italy, and will do more. God pardon him! We are happy in being thus pursued with persevering hatred and calumny. I cannot blame the people that believe the false charges."

While actually engaged in preparing his Conferences, F. de Ravignan considered, after the steps that had been taken against himself and his brethren, whether it was suitable that he should again be seen in the pulpits of Paris. He wrote on the subject to M. Vatimesnil, who replied on the 10th of September:—"My opinion is that you should continue your ministry with the same publicity as before. It is much to be wished that your voice should still be heard in our churches. The large gatherings of Catholics would be a quiet and edifying protest against the measures adopted. I am particularly anxious that there should be no change as to the Lent at Notre-Dame."

This was also the Archbishop's opinion; and the following reply from the General settled the question:—"God shows His love in sending us trials; we adore His holy will and bless it. Do not cease to be an Apostle. Do not fear that your ministry will suffer through the blow which is falling on the Society. Rather have more confidence than of old. Never can we have more reason to reckon on God's help than when we can say with our Lord, *Ego sum vermis et non homo*,—"I am a worm and no man."

Having preached the Advent, and made his own retreat at Metz, F. de Ravignan returned and remained in Paris. No one could find fault with the residence he chose ; he began at once to teach humility and charity. In the Rue Notre-Dame des Champs there is an orphanage founded by an aged lady, the friend of Elizabeth of France, the venerable Countess de Saisseval, who in her youth had received in the court of Louis XVI. the surname of the Heavenly. Often had F. de Ravignan pleaded from the pulpit on behalf of the little orphans of this house, and gained them their cause ; now in his turn he asked of them food and shelter. Some of his brethren met him at this retreat of poverty, and there, close to a sanctuary with Mary for its Patroness, they were happy no less than before their dispersion—happy in being able to observe the rule, and to be once more united as a family.

Blessings more than ordinary attended the Notre-Dame station of 1846. "I always cherished a hope that it would be so," wrote F. Roothaan to the Orator, "and that God in His goodness would give you this consolation by way of amends for the sufferings endured from the persecution." He concluded his letter by recommending him to take care of his health, to withdraw from all the extra work which crowded on him above his strength, except perhaps the Retreat at Nantes and the Jubilee at Liège, for which he was engaged. The order came too late.

The work that had been promised at Nantes was a series of sermons addressed to men in the Cathedral, in the course of the month of May. F. de Ravignan endeavoured to escape it. He was already much exhausted by the recent station at Notre-Dame ; another fatiguing work awaited him in the approaching Jubilee at Liège. But, on the other

hand, his coming was publicly expected ; it would be a great disappointment ; great displeasure was felt at the mere proposal of some delay, and letters full of reproach came to the Provincial of Paris. Hearing this, F. de Ravignan wrote to his Superior : "The trouble which I cause you about the sermons at Nantes fills me with confusion and sorrow. My conceit and want of docility make me continually a source of embarrassment to my Superiors.

"Let us hope that the ill-feeling will subside. But are they not over-exacting ? How can I be independent of the chances to which all men are subject ? After all, with your approval, I accept the work.

"Certainly I should much prefer to remain in Paris until the Jubilee at Liége ; I may add that there are reasons why I should do so ; but I do not want to increase the discontent. Reverend Father, pardon me and bless me, in spite of my weaknesses, or rather because of them."

The interval between the Retreat at Nantes and the Jubilee at Liége was not more than enough to make the journey from one town to the other. At the end of May, F. de Ravignan was still in Brittany, but he was in Belgium at the beginning of June. The Jubilee was the secular celebration in memory of the institution of the Feast of Corpus Christi, which was first kept at Liége, and afterwards adopted by the whole Church ; it was at once a national festival and a religious solemnity.

Every endeavour was made that the ceremonies and exercises should be worthy of the occasion ; many Bishops and several preachers of eminence had come together, and were to speak alternately. F. de Ravignan found that no great harvest was to be gathered when the ministry was thus divided ; he asked leave to undertake alone a Retreat for

men. But there was reason to fear that some jealousy would be aroused by such a distinction, and the Bishop of Liège thought it his duty to withhold his consent. Zeal led the Apostle to make a fresh but fruitless application; but his humility made him think he had done wrong in thus pushing the matter. On the following day he wrote: "I have passed the whole night in begging God's pardon; let us say no more about it: the Bishop was quite right; I quite agree with his views."

He came worn out with labour. After a few sermons he felt he was exhausted: there were symptoms which showed some organic injury. He had fever, a feeling of oppression, cough, and spitting of blood. He immediately found fresh reason for self-reproach and humiliation: he looked on this new trial as a chastisement for his opposition to the wishes of the Bishop. "God acts aright," he said; "He is punishing me for my conceit and self-will; this punishment humbles me exceedingly. I shall preach no more at Liège."

Absolute silence was in fact ordered by the physician; yet, as the Bishop, who thought only of the success of the work, insisted, F. de Ravignan let him have his way; and we read in a note written at the very time appointed for preaching, on June 13: "They have just called me to the pulpit; I shall go." This note was addressed to some French ladies whom piety had brought from Paris to Liège. I must name one among them, the Countess Albert de la Ferronnays: the reason will soon appear.

The exertion increased the evil, which from transient soon became chronic. Next day the invalid sent a report to calm the anxiety of Mme. de la Ferronnays: "I lost my voice entirely from the time of my leaving the pulpit; in other respects I

am better than before mounting it ; no fever, less irritation and oppression. I am recommended rest and absolute silence ; but we shall see. It has come to my ears that the Bishop has been blamed for making me preach yesterday. He gave me no order, far from it ; he only begged it of me with so much earnestness, that I thought I saw in it the will of Heaven, and I gladly obeyed. At present I feel happy in my silence and rest. And then, peace and trust."

In competition with the wishes of the Bishop, F. de Ravignan thought no more of his health than of his own views. On quitting Liége he threw himself at the Prelate's feet, begging pardon as an unprofitable servant. The Bishop clasped him in his arms, saying, with tears, "Reverend Father, your virtues and prayers have done more during this fortnight for the glory of God and of the Blessed Eucharist, than all the conversation and the sermons of the rest."

F. de Ravignan left Liége a sick man ; the larynx was one raw wound, his voice lost, the organ exhausted. Two years are to pass in idleness and suffering.





CHAPTER XIII.

ILLNESS OF 1846.

F. de Ravignan finds pleasure in sickness—Teaches sacred eloquence at Vals—Correspondence with M. Molé—His resignation to the will of his Superiors—Revision of the Toulouse Conférences—He spends a season at Eaux-Bonnes—Notre-Dame de France—He travels in Italy—Devotedness of Mme. de la Ferronnays—He returns to Paris.



DE RAVIGNAN showed himself yet greater in suffering than in action, and to know his value he should be seen in sickness. Pain brought to him joy; he was weary of life, and seemed not only resigned, but smiling and radiant. Few persons were allowed to approach him at this time, for he availed himself of these times of release from labour to plunge himself in solitude, and taste at his leisure the peaceful bitterness of the cross. But for those who were admitted to visit him, it was a fortunate time; the time when they found in him gaiety, affection, and the open heart of a brother.

The invalid was visited by three times of special suffering, at intervals of six years, in 1846, 1852, and 1858; and the years between these were never free from pain. He was afflicted by a constant and

painful malady, which he at first supposed to be occasioned by stone: this was known to no one in the world except his Superior, whom in obedience to his rule he had informed, and the physician whom he was ordered to consult upon this particular subject. It turned out that this terrible disease was not present, but instead of it another, altogether incurable. He was subject to frequent attacks of severe nausea, resembling the worst seasickness. The slightest change of temperature would bring on one of these attacks, the accesses of which in full severity, would sometimes extend over two or three days together. Often he was unable to read a single line, to drink a drop of water, or bear one ray of light. Those who visited him during these times of suffering, found him with bloodshot eyes, his whole face flushed, but with a beaming expression, with peace at his heart, more kind and ready to converse than ever; his only regret was that he had missed a Mass, and he would accuse himself of want of resolution. "I am quite satisfied," he would say with a smile, "for I am very slothful, and I like pain much better than work." Yet he often worked and suffered at once.

There was one point connected with this which the great strength of his mind could alone explain. These attacks of nausea never could be foreseen, and sometimes came on very inopportunistly. The attack would begin in the course of a Retreat, on a feast day, or just before a sermon, and the work had to be done in the midst of a paroxysm. Then after one or two days of complete abstinence from food, without any preparation having been possible, he would rise from his bed, go out, converse as freely as usual, and then soon return to his room to go through with the paroxysm which had been repressed and in a manner suspended.

R

F. de Ravignan succeeded in reconciling lines of thought and of conduct which seemed contradictory : a reasonable regard for his health, and the most thorough disregard of life. The supremacy of reason was too decided for him not to be prudent, and so, however prodigal of his strength, he took care of himself, knowing that his life was not his property, but that he owed to God in the Society the full measure of his days and the use of his powers. He took with simplicity the common precautions, and left all care of the result in the hands of the Master of life. He received the prescriptions of physicians with respect, and observed them scrupulously, for such is the rule ; he was often seen to follow inconvenient and disagreeable courses of treatment, which robbed him of precious hours, and he put on so good a grace that he seemed to relish the employment ; yet he would say that medicine, no less than sickness, was instituted in expiation of our sins ; “ and looking at it this way,” he would say with a smile, “ I have more faith in allopathy than in homœopathy, for it is more faithful to its providential mission.”

On the other side, as I have already remarked, F. de Ravignan began to be thoroughly satisfied when he began to be an invalid. His hopes lay in what makes others anxious. His soul felt as a captive in that prison which is called the body, and to himself his banishment on earth was an exile. Like another Job, he was weary of life. Death he looked on as deliverance, and disease as a happy presage of death. When he first fell ill, in June 1846, he wrote :—“ Pray God that His will may be done in my life and in my death : what is all else ? I am not sorry to discern such a decay of my strength as gives me ground to look forward to the end of my life of sorrow. A day will at length come when eternity shall bring a cure to the ills of time.”

Sickness also afforded F. de Ravignan relief on another point of which he was deeply sensible, and which he thus explained to his friends :—" I have an iron nature, a character so violent and rebellious, that nothing less is needed than a daily mortal struggle against myself. Suffering or Contest,—such is my motto ; sickness is, for me, a truce ; then God relieves me of my duty by taking on Himself the task of conquering and reducing me ; it is easier for me to leave Him to act and myself to suffer, and I am glad to find peace in the cross." Thus sickness was a true relief to this soul amid its incessant war ; he found nothing but joy in sickness, because it brought him peace : the toil of endurance absorbed all his powers, and nothing but sweetness remained to him ; and he that was as a lion in fight became in time of sacrifice as a lamb.

Before the unfortunate occurrence at Liége, F. de Ravignan, availing himself of the liberty allowed him by Superiors, had already chosen a place of toil and recollection for the ensuing summer. " I confess," he had said, " my inclinations would lead me to Notre-Dame d'Ay ; a little time with my good F. Fouillot, then my dear Vals." This plan was acted on.

On the 12th of July he wrote from Vals :—" At length, and for three days past, I have been in the place of my rest : my soul needed it. This evening I begin my retreat. You would like to know the truth about my health. I will tell it you with all simplicity. I feel better : our physician at Lyons again examined me, and found no serious symptoms. There is, he says, exhaustion, no organic injury : be it so.

" I do not conceal from you that my wishes and expectations point to another result. But certainly I shall take care of myself, rest, obey, and abandon

myself to the care of a kind and loving Providence.

"I am about then to live or die in solitude for eight or ten days, to die to all this world that I may live to God."

Retreat gave relief to the body by giving comfort to the soul, and on July 25, the invalid could write :—" My health has been better since my retreat ; I feel as if I was restored to my natural state. Here I am left alone as often as I please, whether for work or prayer, and the time passes very agreeably. But also, as often as I please, I have the company of my young brethren. This life suits me, as would any other position God might ordain. I almost have a spite against you, about the restoration of my health. At least pray that if God gives me strength, I may employ it solely to His glory and the good of souls."

At Vals F. de Ravignan took in hand a work of affecting interest. The orator of Notre-Dame, believing himself to have reached the end of his career, began a course of lectures on sacred eloquence for the benefit of his younger brethren who were destined one day to preach in every language of the world. The Apostle left the work through exhaustion, and employed the remnants of his voice in forming new Apostles. We can still have the advantage of being present at these pious conversations at Vals. When we read the notes so carefully taken by the pupils, we seem actually to hear the lessons given by the master—the terse wording, the forcible inflection. We have thought it right to reproduce some extracts in this place, to place on record his apostolic teaching. He will here himself give an account of his principles of oratory, which will complete the sketch we attempted to give of his mode of speech :—

“What is pulpit eloquence? It is the power of spoken words to draw souls to their Creator.

“This is the highest of ministries, the most difficult and full of danger. We must then highly value it, and bring to it a pious union with God, joined with deep humility.

“He that would speak merely as man wastes his strength on human passion; but to speak as an Apostle, we must go to those holy passions which I will call supernatural: love of God, determination to save souls, the strong all-prevailing zeal that springs from love for poor sinners; in one word, God, God alone, sought and gained through courageous and enduring labour, through ardent and painful prayer. Here you see the whole secret of an apostolic man. There are many who will preach from what they carry in their head; few, very few, speak from their heart, from their bowels of charity. The truth soon becomes known; even the people of the world are not mistaken about it. Listen to the judgment a woman passed on the discourse of some man of God: *It smells of his room.*

“In subordination to this interior principle, the source of sacred eloquence is always the Holy Scripture. You know it well; what you mean to preach is the word of God.

“For models we have Isaiah, the admirable Paul, St Chrysostom the great master of eloquence, St Gregory of Nazianzum. Among our French preachers, Bourdaloue—Bourdaloue, I say again, he is the king of all; Fénelon, with his loving heart. Bossuet is a great orator, it is true, but to be admired rather than imitated. His genius is too great for him to be imitable.

“My desire is to reveal to you the inmost thought of my soul, as a true friend should do,” he said to his young and pious hearers. “Never, or scarcely ever, give Conferences. There are

troops of reasons for not adopting this style: it is too easy; it gives too much opening to vanity; it is too far removed from what is practical. Your great hope, your surest means, will be to hold out to all the consolations of religion. Observe it well. Notice the crying need of these poor souls—*omne caput languidum et omne cor mœrens*—every head is weak, every heart is sick. Restore them breath, restore them life. Lastly, Conferences would put the pulpit itself in jeopardy. Really I do not know how deep we should have fallen ten years since, if the fashion had lasted. Everybody was delivering Conferences. No doubt there are exceptions, some unfortunate cases of necessity; Notre-Dame is one of them. The work there was established for Conferences. I have promised God to do all I can to prevent my example being followed elsewhere.

“There are two, I think two, well-marked ailments of our generation—a rage for dreams, and a deficiency in execution; that is to say, uncertainty in the intellect, weakness in the will. Fight against these. Go through the list of Bourdaloue’s sermons, and make your choice. Select subjects at once instructive and moving. I know very well that this is difficult, but the benefit is found exactly in the difficulty. You will clearly understand that I do not exclude occasional sermons on doctrine. In our times these are necessary. We must first of all attract persons to listen to us. Speak of the need there is for religion, of its permanent happiness and sweetness. We must always look to the heart.

“The scheme of our religion is already perfect. It is not the preacher’s business to deal out the ingenious theories devised by human wisdom; he does not invent, he only changes the form. The will to understand this has been wanting; at least

many of our modern preachers have not understood it, and this is the first cause why preachers now-a-days go astray."

Another day, speaking of composition, he said : "Draw up a plan, lay down the course of the ideas, the advance from one to another, their final effect. This is what is most important, it is almost all. The writing is nothing when this work is performed. But we must not fear trouble. Be laborious, patient, enduring ; at this price you will gain that fulness of force which convinces and persuades.

"The labour of composition should be a martyrdom, and ought to be felt to be such, for without this an apostolic life is worth little or nothing. Trouble must be taken if we hope to do any good. What fatigue and dejection ! Often sluggishness and inability will fill the mind ; there will be no results. It is well ; it makes us humble and devout. In these times we have recourse to God, to the Blessed Virgin ; we gain in recollection and interior spirit.

"We must of course employ, spend all that we have. We could scarcely wish to have genius save for the purpose of glorifying God by saving souls, for without this, genius is nothing. Talent at least, of whatever sort, we must employ, but trample it beneath our feet. We ought to wish to succeed, to do well, very well. Listen to the fertile maxim addressed to us by St Ignatius : ' We must do everything as if we were doing it alone, and look to God for all success, as if we had done nothing.'

"Be on your guard against abstract, metaphysical exactness. This shoal is full of peril on first leaving the schools. There is a danger, too, of being hard, harsh, and reproachful. Be severe from time to time, but never harsh : mark this well.

Love for the sinner is the essence of the Apostle. Let nothing but love prompt even your severity. Rather give comfort and encourage. Fill yourselves with the spirit of mercy. But in God's name I beg you, let there be no softness, no effeminacy, no sham sensibility, nothing sentimental. I know well what I am saying. I speak to you as a father. If any one's character of preaching lead him to sweetness, it is a valuable quality, and an earnest of success ; but even sweetness must be tempered by the prudent admixture of firmness. Look to nothing but souls, and gain them for God alone.

"Clearness is the first condition in every discourse, for the aim of speaking is to be understood without study. Look at Bossuet himself, how clear he is, however sublime he may be. This shows great power of head. At present this quality is often wanting ; a cloudiness prevails, the language is obscure, the ideas ill determined. Preachers do not bring their language down sufficiently in public. I have often been blamed for not being popular enough, and rightly, as I feel. We keep too much to our own way of viewing things, instead of adopting the views of our hearers as they are. To give reality to a truth, we must address the imagination, the faculty most fully developed now-a-days ; we must show every side of our subject, and never scruple to use repetitions, with a constant care to avoid vulgarity, even in the presence of the rudest audiences.

"To produce emotion we must feel it. This true emotion is gained first in prayer, then in the perusal of some favourite author, then in a strong will to attain a proposed end. Do not hesitate to give yourselves full vent ; speak direct to the passions, in every tone by turn ; by unlooked-for strokes, move the depths of your hearers' hearts. True eloquence is a drama. Look at Bourdaloue him-

self, how his logic carries us away ; how earnest he is while he seems so calm. Look above all at the matchless Paul ; he throws himself into the scene, he interrupts himself, he apostrophises his audience, he prays, he weeps, he threatens, he loves, he is a *Mother*.

“We must have some colouring ; but not every one is at will a painter. Here again St Paul is our master. What images there are in his Epistles ! Our Lord speaks by images : in His discourses the deepest thoughts come clothed in sensible forms, the language becomes popular without ceasing to be noble. Reading the Gospel, we are moved without our concurrence.

“Another essential point in all these matters is to have some one to admonish us. Another will see our failings—we are blind in our own case. Besides, God has been pleased to attach great grace to correction received humbly and with docility.”

On another occasion he quoted the saying of Demosthenes, placing all the force of speech in action, and another of Massillon : “My best sermon is the one I know best ;” and he drew from this the conclusion that we ought to know some sermons by heart, and added : “I know very well the trouble of learning by heart ; but the more trouble the better—trouble is just what we ought to have. This wretched fear of taking trouble it is that does all the harm. Would you like me to tell you something of the truth of which I am deeply convinced ? Sloth is what chiefly palsies talent and hinders success. I remember a very sensible remark made to me by a speaker of experience ; he said that we must let a speech *rot*—yes, *rot* in the memory. Beware of losing the power of learning by heart ; nothing can supply the want.

“Nevertheless, I believe that during a retreat, or a mission, we ought not to learn anything by heart,

nor even write anything ; on these occasions, after prayer and serious thought, forget yourself and launch forth. But for stations, learn by heart ; learn by heart, I repeat ; it is absolutely necessary for securing the whole fruit.

“While learning, the thoughts should be more attended to than the utterance, and we should try to identify ourselves with our subject. It is in calm solitary meditation that our language gains fire. The warmth of an extempore discourse can never supply the want of the force that reflection gives. Consider the boundless power of our ministry. Speech is the greatest power in the world. For an hour together, three or four thousand souls derive from us their thoughts, their very life. Speech is the instrument by which God himself chooses to act.

“Before mounting the pulpit, we must lull all agitation of our mind. This truth is taught by experience. When calm we can use our powers ; weakness follows disturbance. Calm, then, is a first necessity ; calm even of body, remark. Put aside all other thoughts ; do God’s work trusting in His grace. Let there be perfect confidence, invincible courage, then peace will come.

“Modesty, a recollected appearance, marks the man of God, points him out, as it were, coming down from the holy mountain. You come forward with recollection, with eyes cast down ; you pray in the posture of deepest reverence ; then you rise, and in an attitude humble and composed you begin the discourse.

“As to the interior, this is what should be aimed at, what I feel very well I have not attained : keep self-mastery while yet giving full scope to passion ; give full scope to passion while yet maintaining some check. Observe a spirited horse, full of generous mettle, but kept in hand by the rider ; none

of his vigour is lost, but his spirit is directed, and is wholly employed in gaining some end, instead of being wasted in useless activity. But the power to do this can come only from God.

"Action ought to be natural. This is a point of the greatest difficulty and rarity. In the Legislature, at the Bar, almost all speakers are natural; very few are so in the pulpit. There we have declamation, sing-song. The true way is to converse with our hearers. Nature at once puts the preacher in direct intercourse with his audience.

"Action ought to be the result of feeling. What is felt deeply is the result of conviction, and prayer makes its way everywhere; if you have this you will be understood. Unction gives to speech something which recalls the Gospel. Sometimes you will feel nothing; what must be done? Have patience. At least let it be clear that you are a man devoted to souls, to sinners, an Apostle.

"Lastly, action should be dignified. The orator should show gravity, modesty, and the religious spirit. Set before your minds our Lord addressing the people; His discourse had animation. He used gesticulation, but the Majesty of the Hidden Godhead was seen in the dignity of His carriage.

"To sum up all that I have said, my dear Brothers, try by making use of prayer, study, and the corrections which may be charitably given you, to arrive at this point: *Be yourselves, without your faults.* For the pulpit, toil is everything; while sloth, on the contrary, hinders all success. The spirit of the Society requires us to seek, for the salvation of souls, all the talent and success in our power. Be full of God, and you will have enough of eloquence."

F. de Ravignan was premature in thinking his health restored; he set to work, though still weak and uncertain as to the future. "Since my retreat,"

he wrote on August 17, "I have been working at getting ready some Conferences for next Lent; they will be on the Law of God, on God as Legislator. If time allow, I shall proceed to that one among several schemes, which obedience shall advise. . . . Perhaps I shall have to revise my former Conferences with a view to publication. Let God do with us what He pleases, without consulting our tastes. That is the best wish we can form." He finished the preparation of the Lent for 1847; but God Himself stayed the orator's course at the moment when he was about to re-enter the pulpit of Notre-Dame.

F. de Ravignan wrote from Vals, on October 1, a letter which we must give at length, for it forms an epoch in his life. We have already mentioned when and how he became acquainted with Count Molé, and the mutual esteem which they conceived. Their sympathy grew with the knowledge of each other; but by this letter the religious placed their friendship at once on a new footing, and gave it a heavenly security from dissolution or decay. Hereafter we shall find these two souls entrusting each other with their most secret thoughts; and later on, interchanging in the Sacrament of Penance acknowledgments of weakness on the one side, and of graces received from Heaven on the other. It seems, too, that F. de Ravignan hereby opened that new apostolic career which God reserved for his last years:—

"Allow me to write to you and comply with a call which I seem to hear in my heart. Ever since I left Paris, I have often thought of doing this, and wished for it; time is passing, and I do not wish to let it slip without sending you my kind remembrance. Your great kindness, your goodness, so full of confidence in me, are engraven in the depths of my soul, and I cannot sufficiently express how

great are my gratitude and my obligations. In God's presence, at prayer and at the holy altar, your name recurs to my mind with a vivid and grateful influence ; I cherish these moments, and seek to prolong them as the best that come to me in the day ; and I feel that I should be full of joy at any good fortune that might happen to you, whether for this world or the future.

" For I cannot help telling you—excuse this language in a poor religious, who just now is almost a hermit—what ardent, consoling, and deep-seated wishes fill my mind when I think of your soul, of its noble, lofty, rich, attractive qualities. For all men whom God has made great, and of this very small number you are one, what further wish can we form than to procure them the everlasting addition to their glory of the full and complete grace to spend their lives as faithful Catholics. Your life is on so many sides so thoroughly Catholic, it deserves so well to be raised to all perfection, and to have every assurance for eternity, that this prayer, this longing, this cry of my heart for you attends me, follows me everywhere. God hears me, I hope. I am overwhelmed at the thought of what I am about to allow myself to say to you ; but I must ask you to cast the blame on your own gracious indulgence, your own affectionate kindness. I am forced to dedicate to you the most tender devotion, the most lasting attachment of which my soul is capable : and even so, I am unable to explain to you the thorough reality, force, and endurance of these my feelings. You will therefore pardon me, I feel assured.

" And then our temporal life is so full of sorrow, so crowded with misconceptions, disappointments, injuries ! when long and wide experience has instructed our conscience, we cannot but see in its light that to prepare for our eternal future is our

most important business, and at the same time the sweetest comfort in our trials. It is such a happiness to rise to God by prayer, to converse with Him, to be nurtured on His Word, and on the faith which He has taught us. The holy practices by which we are to be constantly brought nearer to God, have through the Church and in the communion of the faithful, an influence so powerful and kindly that in hours of quiet and meditation one is apt to ask why all men do not make themselves perfect Christians. And then God after all so well deserves the glory of seeing His Name confessed, the worship of Him practised by those on whom He has pleased to confer a lofty mission among men, and a Christian is so truly a *great citizen*, that emotion fills the heart, and tears come to the eyes as often as this all-absorbing duty is, if not the fundamental ornament, at least the culminating ornament of genius. I am laying my conscience and soul open before you, and I do it persuaded that you will pardon me. You will attribute all this freedom to the personal motives which I just now stated. For nearly three months I have been left to enjoy the happiness of studious retirement and pious meditation, and I seem to feel more than ever the need that is upon me of making that God known and loved Who has consecrated me to His service in a peculiar manner, and Who has ever heaped His graces on me."

The following answer was given by Count Molé : it will be seen that he was very near entering into the feelings of F. de Ravignan :—

"I am deeply touched by your letter. In every line I recognise the mind, the heart, the faith of him whose natural qualities draw me to him nearly as much as his holiness and virtue. You judge, or rather you speak of me with too much kindness. Whatever good there is in me, (I say it to you, in

whose presence I think and speak as in that of God,) whatever good there is in me, and it is very little, is what God has placed there with His own Hand. I was born with a natural inclination towards good, with a detestation of evil, and a love amounting to rapture for the beautiful, the truly beautiful. If, then, I have done less ill than others, I have no reason to feel proud of it, nor even to look forward with more confidence to the account which I shall have to render.

"I have had also a task assigned me, more or less laborious; how I have fulfilled it remains to be seen. I value highly your prayers and good wishes, and believe that I am much helped by them. My name, myself, have come into your mind, have come before you when you were at the holy altar, offering the divine Sacrifice; I thank God for it and you. If anything can rise from earth to heaven, your prayers at such a time must rise thither and gain acceptance. Do not cease, Reverend Father, to let me share them.

"You tell me that you lay open your conscience and your soul; this is to show me by anticipation what I shall see in heaven if I gain admittance there. I will at least respond with equal sincerity and openness. Believe me, that which is wanting in me, that which you ask on my behalf, submission and practice, fulness and perfection of faith, will never come through any effort or urgency. I will not, indeed I cannot, say more at present upon the subject. I will only add, that there are devout persons and practices by which I am no less repelled than I am attracted by sanctity, and that you and your conversation fill me with respect and affection.

"But nothing is added to truth by this, nor taken from it. Truth is *that which is*, and willingly would I give all that I have, my life included, to be

assured of possessing truth. Since the dawn of reason I have never ceased ardently to desire that it might be wholly where you believe it to be, for I know nothing more to be desired, more beautiful or better.

“Notwithstanding all the weaknesses of my life, I can bear this testimony to myself, that I never took evil for good, that I never put away good by sophistical excuses, and that I have laboured incessantly to divest myself of even the smallest interest in continuing an unbeliever, convinced that this is the surest road both for reaching the perfection of faith and also for meriting it.

“Enough of this, Reverend Father ; and besides, have I not told you everything ? What more could you learn from me ? I both beg as a favour and advise you to forget this letter, but forget not him that wrote it. Continue to pray for him ; love him in this world and with a view to the other, and believe that no one feels for you more respect and attachment than myself.

“The accounts of your health give me some anxiety. You do not hoard your strength enough ; you are wanting in submission to the limitations which God has fixed. I know no man whom Providence has framed more suitably, has endowed more richly for the work of converting the evil on the earth into good ; beware, then, of shortening your stay in the world, and of omitting any part of what you are able to accomplish. Never shall I forget the painful impression made on me when, last Holy Saturday, I saw you in the pulpit of Notre-Dame, and an earnestness more than natural made up for the failure of your strength. I am sorry that your Superiors did not deprive us for a time of the pleasure of hearing you, and that you are going to Marseilles to preach the Advent. Oh that you were reserved exclusively

for us, for that old church of Notre-Dame, with which your name and your holy works will be forever associated!"

In the beginning of October a hasty message came to inform F. de Ravignan that the Countess de Saisseval was lying seriously ill near Issoire, twenty leagues from Vals. This lady, a Lastic by birth, whose memory is so truly blessed, had come from Paris at the age of eighty to bid a last farewell to her relatives in Auvergne. At the Château de Parentiguat, the home of her childhood, and the residence of that noble family of Lastic which had given one of the first Grand Masters to the Knights of Malta, a fever came on which hastened the close of a life so long preserved from the attacks of old age. At this news F. de Ravignan, forgetful of himself, thinking nothing of his own bad health nor of the twenty leagues of mountainous roads that he must pass, determined to go and console her who, when the Jesuits were dispersed in Paris, had so kindly given shelter to him and his brethren in the humble retreat of Notre-Dame-des-Champs. He was at Parentiguat within twenty-four hours from the receipt of the message. Surprise was expressed at his speedy arrival. "I should have got here yet sooner," he replied, with the simplicity of a child, "if I could have caught the first coach. But I had not got leave, so I had to go and find the Superior, and then I had to wait for the second coach." The sick lady was already beginning to improve when he came, and was very much better as soon as she saw him. It was the will of Providence to restore her to the midst of her adopted children, that, as the last crown of her charity, she might be followed to the grave by those orphans to whom she had been a second mother.

On the 10th of October F. de Ravignan left

Vals for Lyons by way of Louvesc and Our Lady of Ay. The journey was not free from risk. The weather was frightful. Continued storms and torrents of rain had caused the streams to overflow their beds and cover the roads: already several accidents had been reported. He gave the following account of his journey:—"I crossed the Loire, which was in high flood, without the smallest accident; but the coach on which I was might easily have been overturned. I was on my way to Louvesc, the place where the relics of St Francis Regis are preserved. Our good Angels were my protection, and the *Holy Father*, as he is called among these mountains."

Having offered his grateful prayers at the tomb of St Francis Regis, F. de Ravignan came down from Louvesc to see his Brethren who peopled the little desert of our Lady of Ay. He paid them only a passing visit; but he did not refuse to edify them by a pious address. Though yet far from well, he was on his way to Marseilles for the Advent station, and he now made a previous trial of the drooping powers of his voice. He took for his theme a passage of the Exercises, and spoke the dictates of his heart while enlarging on the advantages of silence; with an accent which those who heard him can never forget, he made all sensible of the happiness of a solitary soul, the blessedness of a life hidden with Jesus Christ in God.

F. de Ravignan passed only a few days at Lyons, where he had an appointment to meet his friend the Abbé Dupanloup on his return from a journey in Italy. About the end of October he reached Avignon; and there, presuming on the restoration of his strength, or wishing to make another trial of it, as he himself said, he promised to preach the All-Saints sermon at the Cathedral; but on the morning of the 1st of November God smote him,

and settled the question. I leave the preacher to tell his own story, in a letter written to F. Rubillon, the Provincial of Paris :—

“Up to this time I had, I thought, persuaded myself that my strength was sufficiently restored, and that the station at Marseilles was not out of the question. God has decided otherwise, and it is now abundantly clear, both to me and to everybody here, that I cannot even make the attempt to preach a sermon. To tell the truth, for six months past I have, without intermission, suffered from an exhaustion in the chest, more or less painful. To-day my voice is not sufficient even for much conversation at one time. The seat of the evil is in the organs of respiration.

“On All-Saints Day, divine Providence seemed to wish to warn me. I fainted during my thanksgiving, and remained for some time unconscious. I did not come to myself until I was taken to my room. It was a simple swoon, and no one knows exactly what to attribute it to. I had not been fasting the day before. By the advice of the Father Superior I have given up all kneeling at prayer for any length of time, and even all practices of mortification. Two physicians were called in. My old friend and Spiritual Father at Bordeaux, F. Ribeaux, inquired carefully into every point; we discussed the question of my health thoroughly. I explained all my symptoms to the physicians and to good Father Rector. It was settled that I was not to preach the Advent at Marseilles, that I was not to give a single sermon, and so on. A particular course of diet was prescribed, and I follow it. I believe, too, that I shall comply with your wishes by taking care of myself, and I do so. I cherish the hope that at least I shall be able to preach my last Lenten station next spring in Paris, and my favourite Retreat.

Whatever may turn out, I abandon myself to the care of God, and the wisdom of my Superiors. My mind, too, is quite at ease.

"Ought I to return at once to Paris, or to go elsewhere, or stay here? Every place would suit me, wherever you tell me to go. Be so kind as to settle it, without reference to me.

"Grant, O God, that my sins may not hinder the good of souls!"

Two days after this letter, F. de Ravignan, as if he felt the desire of death grow with his sickness, thus poured forth his heart into the bosom of F. Guidée, his friend and Superior at Paris:—"Mine is a wretched life now: *Qui medice vivit misere vivit*. But I find my rest and confidence in God's will, and my soul is quite at ease. Yet I will not conceal from you how much I could wish for the close of this wretched life; it is a weight and weariness. I say to myself, Why cumberest thou the ground? Then, what should I be fit for? But certainly I do not shun the toil, and if the Lord were to restore me to strength, that I might further expiate my sins, and that help might be given to souls, I would hasten to you with joy to continue my course. Dear Retreat at Notre-Dame! am I not to give it even once again? I do not know the final opinion of the physicians on my state. On the whole, it may be probable that I shall recover my strength, and I certainly feel in myself some signs of life. Everything for God's good pleasure.

"So F. Rousin is dead. Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord! His room is waiting for me at Toulouse; it will serve to enkindle my zeal.

"The news from Canada is very interesting. We do not as yet know whether any of our Fathers have fallen victims to the typhus. What an envi-

able lot would be theirs ! I see much to long for in such a death, and in every form of death, considering the world and its woes. I find it needs great virtue to cling to life.

“My kind remembrances to good Father Cagnard. Tell him to wait for me, and not go without me.”

This Father, who was to wait for him, was at the time on his death-bed at Paris.

There was no more question about the Advent at Marseilles, but several other questions were still on hand. Obedience in the Society is sweet as well as vigorous ; a Superior will commonly propose some questions to his subject, almost consult his opinion ; the other explains with simplicity his needs and desires, and then resigns himself beforehand to the judgment of him that is the representative of God. The reader shall be present at one of these pious consultations where mutual confidence prevailed. F. de Ravignan wrote from Avignon to his Provincial, F. Rubillon, who had asked him his own opinion regarding himself. His letter bears date Nov. 23, 1846 :—

“After thinking the matter over before God, I believe that I can open my heart to you as to my position. F. Ribeaux is going to procure a consultation of two or three physicians. I shall candidly explain to them anew everything concerning my health, and beg them to give their opinion out of my hearing, that they may be able to speak more freely. F. Ribeaux will himself write to you on the subject, and I am glad not to have to know what he and the physicians say.

“What climate, what residence, do you think proper for me ?

“God has given me the grace of being, as I believe, truly indifferent. As long as I am in a house

of the Society for life and for death, if they will bear with me and keep me there to the end, I am satisfied. However, after prayer, and observing the rules of the Exercises on Election, I deem it my duty to lay before you two remarks.

"Weak and tired as I am, I feel *instinctively* that there is some danger for me in any travelling. Especially I dislike the thought of a tour with my brother, pious and good as he is. I have no wish to be caught by nature, and I feel a real dread of going to my family. I venture to ask you to decline even the most pressing offers.

"You are kind enough in your letter to mention three towns—Nice, Toulouse, and Rome. I feel very thankful to you, but still I think that I can and ought to ask to stay with my Brethren in France. I am going to write to Rome to this effect, and the answer I shall give my brother when he comes here this week will be a most positive refusal, except under an order from my Superiors.

"If I grow weaker, if my symptoms become more serious, and if my end is near, I should be sorry to be a burden to any foreign province and house, even the *Gesù*. I have the deepest love and veneration for F. General, and for my true and particular friend F. de Villefort. However, I do not know; my soul and body alike long for a French house, French Fathers and Brothers. You, Father, must decide. F. Delfour and Br. d'Arnouville are already sick and being taken care of at Toulouse. Why should not I go to join them? F. Ogerdias is very pressing for me to come.

"As to the Conferences and the Retreat at Notre-Dame, after much prayer and self-examination, I do not find full light nor interior conviction. I feel nothing but doubt. Sometimes it seems to me

that, after all, I am strong enough, that my health is but slightly injured ; and then, soon after, I feel an exhaustion in the chest, in voice and strength, which makes me fear that it will be long before I am able to ascend a pulpit. So, for my part, I do not know what to say. To the physicians, to my Superiors, to God, I leave the business of disposing of me, and giving an answer to the Archbishop of Paris. I find consolation in leaving myself to the boundless mercy of our Lord and the charity of the Society. But I am deeply humbled at the thought of my sins, my pride, my countless infidelities, which make me unworthy to labour for the good of souls, and to help the work of my beloved Mother, the Society.

“I throw myself at your knees, Reverend Father; pardon and pray for me.”

It was settled that the invalid should pass the winter at Toulouse, and not give the Lent in Paris.

On the Feast of his Patron Saint, December 3, 1846, as if his first apostolate were to close, as we shall see his second close, under the patronage of St Francis Xavier, he received the following kind letter from the Archbishop of Paris, Mgr. Affre :—

“I need not tell you the two sources of the deep sorrow I just now feel,—that you are sick, and are condemned to silence.

“I thank you for all the good you have done, and pray God, Whose grace helps the good work, to restore you the strength to enable you soon again to enter the pulpit of Notre-Dame.”

Humility is never tired of accusing itself. F. de Ravignan ascribed it to his own sins, that he was forced to suspend his labours ; the Lord, he said, had broken him as an unserviceable tool. He wrote about this time : “Before God I bewail my sins which force me away from my ordinary min-

istry, and condemn me to repose. I am grieved for this, and I assure you candidly that I have no other trouble. In my heart I feel so happy to live and to die in the Society." Yet he added, for his state was just then undergoing a marked though transient change: "I had supposed with perfect calm that I was making some steps towards the end. But there have been so many kind prayers for me! Yesterday I thought that St Francis Xavier was going to cure me; if so, may he give me his own spirit and heart! I have some fear or hope that I must still stay some time in this world. At least I shall have the happiness of consecrating all my strength to my beloved mother the Society and to the salvation of souls; the happiness too of finding myself at work among my dear Fathers and Brothers."

On December 9, F. de Ravignan fled before the *mistral* at Avignon, and went to pass the winter at Toulouse. His first care on reaching his new residence was to go into retreat to prepare for the feast of Christmas. On completing the course of the Exercises, he scrupulously found occupation for his leisure time. By the wish of his Superiors he occupied himself principally in revising his earlier Conferences: thirty-nine received from him fresh touches, and were arranged and prepared for the press.

At Toulouse he still found a means by prayer to assist in the works he had carried on in Paris; he gave little thought to the Conferences, but much to his dear Retreat, to which he gave all his heart. He said in one of his letters:

"I am full of sadness when I think of the Retreat at Notre-Dame. I pray earnestly that it may be given, that it may succeed, and that its fruits may endure and increase. *Only let Christ be preached.* Another will do it better than I. Pray

much that the work may be prosperous in other hands."

This apostolic man was reduced to inactivity, but his thoughts never ceased to be full of God's glory and of victories over souls; and he was able at least by his letters to encourage those who were waging the holy war, under whatever flag. He was entering on that correspondence, so varied in form, but constant in piety, which was his great labour and almost a second ministry during the last ten years of his life. Mgr. Parisis, at that time Bishop of Langres, thus replied to congratulations received from F. de Ravignan: "When a perfect man of God, such as you, tells me that the Lord has destined me for this high mission, and given the gift of fulfilling it, I feel calm return to my soul. May God be pleased to preserve you for service in His militant Church!"

On the 18th of January 1847, F. de Ravignan expressed his approval of the recently established Institution for promoting the keeping of the Sunday, in the following letter addressed to the revered M. Gossin, who had acquired the name of the Master of Good Works:—

"My very dear friend, God blesses and supports you in the multiplied works you undertake for His glory. The Societies of St Francis Regis and St Vincent of Paul will be your crown. Be glad: *Great is your reward.* In the midst of the overwhelming cares which you have so nobly taken on you, God has again led you to the idea of greatest practical advantage, or at least to one among the most useful. The profanation of Sunday is a misfortune far more alarming than the scarcity or the financial crisis. How can it be that God is not angry with us when for the people He is as though He were not? I really do not see that practical atheism can be more thoroughly expressed than by

the habitual public and universal violation of the Lord's Day. No more worship, no more religion, practically no more God. May your holy schemes call down a thousand blessings on you ; I ask it in the name of the Church of France ! Prayer, the prudent co-operation of some persons who undertake to observe the Sunday, such are the excellent beginnings which will lead to great results. I approve the plan with all my heart, and will assist you as far as I shall have the opportunity.

"Be of good heart, my dear friend ! I am yours for life and for death."

The letters of F. de Ravignan, often addressed to persons of eminence, are full of comfort, exhortation, direction. A discreet reserve is here necessary, but at least I may be permitted to speak of those who have gone from among us. I am glad to quote a few lines from M. de Chateaubriand, which show that the soul of the author of the *Genius of Christianity* was sincerely Christian, and his heart full of respectful sympathy for the orator of Notre-Dame. He is answering a letter of condolence on the death of Madame Chateaubriand :

"I keep your letter as a memorial, and I place all my hope in Him who would have all men to be saved.

"Accept the expression of my high admiration, and if I may venture to say so, my veneration for you."

"CHATEAUBRIAND."

Among the chosen souls whom F. de Ravignan, while absent from them, directed by his letters, I must certainly mention the Countess Albert de la Ferronnays, whom I have already mentioned more than once, and whom we met at the Jubilee at Liège. While she is yet young, ripe before her time, God is about to pluck her for Himself. These two souls, so full of interior life and generosity,

understood each other well on spiritual matters : " All the yearnings prompted by my zeal, all the devotion of my poor soul, all my prayers are daily for you," wrote F. de Ravignan to her from Toulouse ; " let this spiritual fellowship exist between us." We shall see that in 1848 God gave His own sanction to this exchange in prayer, and took the one life for the other.

While F. de Ravignan from the depth of his retreat was cheering others, he longed to be himself again at work, so slow he felt his death in coming ; stimulated by the example of St Francis Xavier, his zeal indulged even dreams of apostolic employs. Thus he told his Superior :—" Now, after all that has happened to grieve the heart of my mother the Society, I feel drawn to ask of God the restoration of my voice, and of the organs which produce it. . . . If I live long enough, and the mission of the North is at work, I should ask to be sent on it ; I did ask it long ago." His mind had always been full of zeal for distant missions. At the very end of his life his wish was to die at least in Cayenne, in the convict prison.

F. de Ravignan was summoned to Paris after Easter to consult M. Récamier, a man equally eminent for skill in his profession and for devoted friendship. He came on April 11, and after a few days' stay he started again for the College of Brugelette, in Belgium, on the frontier. More than once he had found pleasure in visiting Brugelette, and now once more he enjoyed himself in seeing his dear children round him, the sight of whom and their simplicity delighted him. On his return to Paris both physicians and superiors ordered him to visit Eaux-Bonnes. It was hoped that a season there would benefit him, as it had done before ; but he was no longer so young as then, and the result was very different. F. de Ravignan had had mis-

givings about this treatment. As soon as he received orders to adopt it, he forgot all his disinclination, and turned his face towards the South. As early as June 8 he sent news of his arrival:—

“My journey has been quick and comfortable. I started on the last day of May, and on June 2, I supped at the Hôtel Gontaut at Pau. There, as everywhere, the good mistress of the hotel showed the greatest kindness, anticipating my wishes in every way. On Thursday the 3d I got settled at Eaux-Bonnes, with Elie de Gontaut. Vatimesnil came to meet me at the coach, and was very attentive and obliging. He really deserves the name of friend; we see each other two or three times a day. Elie de Gontaut serves as the *companion* our rule requires; he sleeps in the room next mine, and we take our meals together; he is to me as a brother, child, and beloved friend. I have learned to know him well, and in consequence to love him more than ever.

“Everything here is dreadfully dear. I find it a trial and a punishment that God sends me, when I am forced to submit to this sort of life, and to receive services which cost so much, and which are never done for Christ's poor. But the kindness of the Society affects me more deeply than anything I can express.

“I am the only Priest here, and my Mass is the only Mass even on Sundays. Vatimesnil, Elie de Gontaut, M. de Chabrol, (eldest son of the former Minister, and a comrade of mine during the campaign of the Hundred Days,) all of them religious and earnest men, give me more than enough society. As to ladies, I happily do not know any here, and have not seen any except M. de Vatimesnil's family: drinking this boasted ‘good water,’ bathing, walking among the beautiful mountains, eating, sleeping: these and the spiritual duties occupy nearly all my time.

"I feel very much as I did at starting. The effect of the waters tries me much, and it is quite right. May all that is bad in my nature come out. There is still something wrong in the sounds of the chest, and my mind is not settled.

'The Chapel contains at least the Blessed Sacrament; it is a great comfort.'

A young English lady, a Protestant, had also come to seek health of body at Eaux-Bonnes; she found health of soul. F. de Ravignan met her, and brought her to the Church, this being the first of the long series of conversions which were to give joy to the last ten years of his apostolic career. I will leave the young Catholic herself to tell us what strength she gained from the grace of the Sacraments, and what peace in the hope of Heaven. She wrote to F. de Ravignan:—

"I have begged the physician to tell me the whole truth, assuring him that I could bear it; then he let me know that very possibly I shall leave this world before the winter. I was able to bear this with perfect calm; I venture to think that God then supported me, and that I still have His support; for I have had no sadness since, but am only a little graver.

"Never did I find myself so close to the solemn idea of death, my own death. Pray for me, my dear Father; pray above all that my last days may be brightened by the presence of God, that He grant me His support, and that the shades of death may not weigh down my soul so much as to hide my Saviour from me. Speak to me, dear Father, as you so well know how, on the goodness of God, His mercy, the joys of Heaven: tell me that I shall be there."

Soon after, when the hand of death was on her, she wrote again: "MY DEAR FATHER,—I make a last effort to express to you my gratitude in the

only way which I think you would wish, by saying that in being a Catholic I find all the consolation I hoped for. I beg your blessing again and always ; I am entering my tomb, and I give you my blessing."

This note was written in pencil with tremulous fingers, and is dated from Pau on November 3, 1847 ; on the 5th Mrs Fagan quietly passed from the bosom of the Church to the bosom of God.

On leaving Eaux-Bonnes, the Father, whose illness continued, devoted eight days, from the 21st to the 29th of July, to Saint-Laurent, the loved home of his childhood. The scenery alone remained unchanged. This was a joyful accession to the party, but there was sorrow for the losses it had sustained : Xavier became Gustave again, and took his place at the same table with them, but he also knelt with them at the same altar to pray for those that had passed away.

By the 31st of July, F. de Ravignan had again joined his other family, and wrote from Bordeaux : " At last I have got to the end of this disagreeable life at the Waters, which suits me so little ; I came to my own life on the feast-day of our Holy Founder. There is no great change in my health ; I am more weary and weaker after the Waters than I was before. They tell me that the excitement of this work is good for the health ; very well, it is all right. Let us be happy and quiet in the hands of God."

It will be remembered that he was the first Superior at the commencement of the house at Bordeaux. After the fashion of the humble, he ascribed to himself whatever trials had afterwards befallen it. " God punishes others on my account," he would say, " and misfortune was brought on the house through its founder."

At last F. de Ravignan went to make his sum-

mer retreat close to Bordeaux, in the small country-house at Canolle, where, some years before, he used to write his Conferences ; and on August 10 he reached his dear house at Vals for what was to be his last visit.

For the first time since 1835 the orator of Notre-Dame found that he had no preparations to make for Lent ; the Conferences for 1847 had never left his desk. Let us see how he employed himself in addition to prayer and private study : “ I am setting our young scholastics here to write sermons, but I scarcely open my lips to them. The orders of my Superiors, and my own state, alike require silence.”

Meantime the course of politics gave him much matter for thought ; from his retreat, as from a quiet haven, he marked all the signs that gave presage of the storms that shook Europe ; on the mountain he raised his hands to Heaven on behalf of the Church, his country, and the Society, so menaced everywhere, and above all at Rome.

“ How strange, how sad is the course of events ! ” he wrote ; “ Rome, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Belgium, and our own poor France. . . . Some terrible blow seems unavoidable. Whither will Providence lead us ? what are we to look for ? and the Society, what will become of it ? I know not. But I do know, or at least I feel a deep conviction, that, in the position in which we are placed, we ought more than ever to devote ourselves to the work of our own perfection, and throw ourselves into the arms of God. There is much to grieve for, but the Lord is good.

Before bidding farewell to Vals and the town of Puy, so dear to St Francis Regis, and still so deserving our gratitude, he left the inhabitants of Velay a lasting memorial of his sojourn among them. He first conceived, and by the influence of his name

gave popularity to his idea, worthy at once of a Christian and Frenchman: that of raising on the top of the peak called Corneille, which overhangs the old cathedral and picturesque city, a colossal statue of the Immaculate Virgin, Patroness of France. We have witnessed the accomplishment of this idea; the metal of guns, the trophies of our brave soldiers, was given by our Sovereign; an artist was found whom the spirit of faith inspired, and the piety of the people did the rest.

F. de Ravignan was sent for to Lyons, at which place his destination was to be determined on. "There will be a new examination of everything," he wrote on October 18, "and holy, quiet obedience, the guidance of God Himself, will direct my steps. Let us wish for one thing only, that God's will be done. If it please divine Providence to prolong the trial and keep me back from the ministry of souls, I will humble myself under the fatherly hand of my Judge, and confess His justice and my own nothingness. Let us pray and be resigned!"

It was settled that he should pass the winter at Rome. F. General invited him for a visit; and, moreover, the persecution had crossed the mountains, and F. de Ravignan, glad to have a share in it, said: "I am very well pleased to be at Rome in the present serious crisis."

He went by land as far as Genoa, and then by sea to Civita Vecchia, and on the 24th of November the invalid arrived at Rome, not over-fatigued. As he passed through Piedmont, Nice, Turin, and Genoa, he often heard the cry, *Gioberti for ever! Death to the Jesuits!* Italy was all in commotion. "I noticed a circumstance equally remarkable and painful," he wrote, "on the day I spent in Leghorn during the vessel's stay in that port. Thanks to my French soutane and round hat, I was able to walk about the streets, and get the servants to talk freely

at the hotel where I dined. There is no more regular government in Leghorn. Everything is settled by the people—that is to say, by a few idlers and a spouting lawyer. The City Guard execute justice as they see fit. That very morning, the Commissioner of Police had been arrested, by the authority of the people, because he was suspected of conniving with the Austrians. They told me, too, of a Governor, belonging to the Jesuit party, who had been driven out. Suppose they had known who I was!

“The people at Leghorn literally spend their lives in the streets, either doing nothing or mounting guard. The waterman, who took me on board again, told me as he was rowing, ‘Yes, the *Débats*, Guizot’s paper, which calls us revolutionary! we gibbeted it, *impiccato*, at the Café de l’Union, and then we burned it. The people of France are sound, but the Government. . . . Why does not Pius IX. take to horse? We would go with him, and drive out the Austrians!’

“On board the steamer there was a Roman refugee, going back after three years’ exile; he had heard who I was, and came to speak to me in the presence of some others. I tell you one of his remarks:—‘Robespierre, that real saint,’ (he lifted his hat as he said this) ‘he cut off the heads of all who gave him trouble. That is what ought to be done.’ After this we separated with every mark of civility.

“And Rome, Rome. My first getting there was not much better. The very day after my arrival there was the installation of the Municipality in the Capitol, with great parade. We watched the procession in the square before the Gesù without our being much seen. As Cardinal Altieri’s state carriage was passing in front of his own palace, and consequently in front of the Gesù, a signal was given for

cries of *Gioberti for ever !* and some miscreants added, *Ganganelli for ever ! The Swiss for ever !* Would you believe that all the newspapers here, except the *Diario* which says nothing, have hailed with joy the capture of Fribourg, and the triumph of the Federal arms ?

“ Hatred to us is quite the rule ; not a word from any one in our defence. Really no one would be safe who printed anything of the kind. On the other hand, every pamphlet and newspaper in abuse of us is printed again and again, and widely circulated. Tuscany is vomiting them forth incessantly.

“ And about the censorship ? It goes for nothing. It is in the hands of the leaders. A poor inoffensive writer was indiscreet enough to have an article printed, saying a word in favour of the Swiss Catholics ; the impression was seized, a tumultuary visit was made to the printer, all the shop was upset, all the copies were taken and burned in the open street in Rome : the author was forced to fly.

“ It is impossible for the Government to have a journal of its own, and in a moderate spirit. The Editor of the poor *Diario* has declared that he cannot go on ; he is in danger and withdraws, and as yet no one has been found to succeed him. You may understand how the Jesuits are situated. Men are carried blindly away. How well I here see the value of our noble friends and champions in France ! Nobody now in Rome would dare to call and avow himself a friend of the Society. It is rumoured that M. Rossi has received despatches that he is to protect us. What a stage-play !

“ The Pope is very much out of spirits : I am not surprised at it ; his heart must feel much. All the Cardinals are in terror. Father General is sick ; no better could be expected ; but he still attends to business.

"And no reforms are made; the real, great abuses are not corrected, and a system of terrorism is set on foot. Such is the state of Italy. Others may, if they like, see nothing but one long religious festival.

"But God is watching over His Church; let us pray, and trust ourselves to His keeping."

On the 2d of January 1848, F. de Ravignan gave an account of the great annual ceremony at which he had been present, the only spot of comfort he found amid so many sorrows. "In spite of all manifestations of feeling, in spite of a very real and rather serious attack of sickness, the noble kindness of the Pope induced him to come as usual to be present at our *Te Deum* and solemn Benediction for the end of the year. He said he would have himself carried in men's arms, rather than not come. Everything went off very well, and with great splendour. There were a great number of Cardinals. In the streets the Pope was received with unanimous and respectful cries, and he gave us his blessing with marked tenderness.

"At Rome every sort of attack is made on us: the Pope has distinctly declared that he will die a martyr's death rather than suppress us. We are waiting in confidence and peace."

The letters written by F. de Ravignan from Rome during this visit, describing the scenes he witnessed, would furnish materials for a general history of this time of sorrow; but we must confine ourselves to a simple biography. In the course of December he had smuggled into France some notes intended to enlighten men's minds as to the nature and tendency of the Italian movement, and as to the identity of radicalism in Switzerland, France, and Italy. On this he received a long letter from Paris, in which one of his friends urged him to rescue the Society from its position by making a

profession of political faith of a liberal complexion. If such a declaration were made publicly and by authority, it would, it was said, settle the public opinion. It would no longer be possible to charge the Jesuits with being behind the advancing age, with having a retrograde spirit, and opposing the progress of thought, and the improvements of the time.

The truth was, the enemies of monarchy charged the Society with being devoted admirers of the age of Louis XIV., just as under Louis XIV. they were charged with being the enemies of kings. The Jesuits were persecuted at the same time at Rome as absolutists, and at Naples as liberals.

There is no need to conceal F. de Ravignan's political opinions ; and we do not hesitate to publish his answer to his kind friend, written as it was in confidence. After describing the position of the Society, he went on :—

“ Things being so, what would you have us poor Jesuits do, attacked, insulted, entrapped on every side ? What declaration could restore our character in the eyes of the multitude intoxicated or deceived by the false teaching of radicalism ? And tell me, would it suit our character to make a solemn public declaration on political questions ? But the Society no more knows anything of declarations of political faith than the Gospel or the Church knows and teaches them.

“ The Society neither has, nor can have, other politics than those of the Church. Like the Church, the Society accommodates itself equally well to every form of government. It everywhere inculcates respect for the persons actually in power, and obedience to them, with love for the institutions of the nation. If the pupils of the Jesuits used to extol the Bourbons in France, it is for the same reason as they now extol William

Tell in Switzerland, Washington in the United States.

“Among the most widely-spread charges is one still met with continually, that the Society mixes itself up with politics. Now-a-days some people think that it does not mix itself up with them enough ; they would be glad to see the Society at the head of the movement going on in Europe, or giving it a decided support.

“The Society will do well to steer by its compass, to do like the Church : to approve nothing and condemn nothing, but seize every opportunity of claiming the enjoyment of its share in the public liberty.

“We have the mission of Apostles to every place ; to all nations ; everywhere we aim at training true Christians, who will then necessarily be good citizens. Of course we detest tyranny, despotism ; no doubt we prefer liberty ; but we have no mission to teach the principles of politics in any country, to take any part in the changes that may be made in the public institutions. We have no fear of liberty ; our only fear is of those who in the name of liberty attack and overthrow Catholic institutions.

“But all that we could do in this direction would be of no avail. Our name is enough ; it is hated ; nothing will restore it to favour.

“Must we declare ourselves in favour of Pius IX. ? He knows our feelings, everybody knows them that is in good faith. You may be sure nothing will change the public mind. God is our guard.

“So we continue as before. We carry on our work, hold our tongues, pray and wait. In every country, as Catholics and as religious, we claim, as a right, the air of heaven for ourselves, and liberty for the Church. Then we always try to do all the good in our power to those who hate us ; and we

believe that so we remain within the spirit of our vocation.

“When we are represented as, somehow or other, hostile to liberty, we hardly know what to make of it ; either the speaker is slandering, or he is deceived. We love all that God loves. We sincerely wish that nations may enjoy liberty ; but also that the Church and conscience may be free from oppression.”

In such terms did F. de Ravignan make before a friend the profession of the faith he refused to the public, and all his politics consisted in having none. Such are the politics of the Society also, as he said. The Jesuits are friends of monarchy under a monarchy, republicans under a republic, or rather they are nothing but Catholics and priests. They are nothing else, in order that they may be all things to all men ; they are devoted sons of their age and country, but on condition of being, in the first place, the devoted sons of God and of the Church. And it seems to have been a result of this position apart from all systems and opinions, that F. de Ravignan gained the confidence of all. It was known that he was tied to no cause but that of God, that he was unbiassed by any political feeling, impartial in his decisions, and that not only would he never injure any one, but that he was the devoted friend of every man in whatever cause.

Happen what may, no change comes to God and the soul ; and a man stout of heart goes forward with even step along his road. In Rome, amidst the troubles of Italy, the habits of F. de Ravignan suffered no change. In the month of February he left this lower world, the sport of every hand that plays with it, and mounted to a better land, retiring calmly into the bosom of the unchangeable God. On coming out of retreat a

sacrifice awaited him, or rather a consolation. The heroic virtue of a woman is brought into contrast with the injustice of the world. It is the last time that I shall name the Countess Albert de la Ferronnays ; but before relating the circumstances of her death, it is well to give some account of her life.

This lady, illustrious alike for piety and nobility, was of Russian family. By marrying the son of the French ambassador at St Petersburg, the young lady became French but not Catholic. Her soul was to be dearly bought. Her husband fell ill, and with a love stronger than death, he did not hesitate to offer his own life for the conversion of one so much beloved. Heaven heard his prayer ; when he was at the point of death she was received into the Church. She made her first Communion at the side of the bed where he received the last Viaticum. The description of this scene, worthy of the days of old, given by Mgr. Gerbet, Bishop of Perpignan, is one of the most charming pages in our sacred literature. A soul so great well deserved to be bought at so high a price.

From the time of this death, which won her to the Church, Mme. Albert de la Ferronnays gave herself wholly to God, and began a life of sacrifices which, in turn, was to end in her offering herself a whole burnt-offering. While still young and tenderly brought up, distinguished both for her natural and acquired graces, her hand sought by many noble admirers, she remained always clothed in the deepest mourning ; and, free from family duties, the troubles of life and the exactions of the world, she made herself a desert in the middle of Paris, and lived a life such as was lived at Nazareth. Her mansion was a narrow cell in the house of the nuns of St Thomas of Villanova ; she never left this room but to go to church or

to visit the poor, and one or two friends only were admitted to visit her. She gave all that she had to give, her charity reducing her even to want ; and in her last sickness, such was the dearth of common necessities, that she in her turn came to receive alms from the hands of her friends, so that she shared with her Lord Jesus the glory of voluntary poverty.

For many years F. de Ravignan had been the director of Mme. de la Ferronnays. Before giving an opinion as to the path to which God called her, he had awaited light from on high ; but as soon as he recognised the will of Heaven, he told it to her, and this courageous soul, darting forward on the way of perfection he pointed out, soon finished her course and attained the goal. We will give the last lines she addressed to her director. One evening in December 1847, by the light of a little lamp in her cell at St Thomas of Villanova, she wrote :—

“REVEREND FATHER,—How good you are to write to me ; and yet it is a month since I wrote to you ; it does not seem to me near as much, the time passes so quickly, and then we do meet together before God. Your kindness even at a distance has always a good effect on my soul.

“I am uneasy about your health, though I do not worry myself. How happy you are to be staying at the Gesù, so that you are one of the happy, persecuted Jesuits !

“I should be very ungrateful to envy another's lot, at a time when I feel a happiness which astonishes myself, and which, after God, I owe to you. Heaven sent you a good thought to tell me to live this life. I have a great relish for it, which the distractions of the world do not give. My

heart is gay, though I still burn a little funeral lamp. God makes a spoiled child of me, even in a material sense, for I have found everything much pleasanter than I expected. And you are spoiling me too, to let me write like this to you at Rome, at such a crisis. My retreat was, I hope, beneficial, and I always like retreats so much as to wish for two a year.

“How happy, Father, eternity will be! Some things here below are so full of sorrow, so full of darkness, that it is strange one can feel any joy of heart.

“Give me your blessing, and may God reward you, among your other merits, for the good you have done my soul, are doing, and will do hereafter.”

Mme. de la Ferronnays took care not to consult F. de Ravignan on a plan which had come into her mind, and which she confided only to her *interim* director, and to a lady, one of her most intimate friends. Experience had taught her how availing is sacrifice. Remembering what her soul had cost her pious and generous husband, and understanding, too, how important it was that F. de Ravignan should be preserved, she made a compact with the Master of life, offering herself as a victim, and we may piously believe that she drew upon herself a blow which had not been destined for her. However it may be, the Apostle was restored to the earth, and Mme. de la Ferronnays was, as we hope, received into heaven.

On the 8th of February, F. de Ravignan learned that she, who had devoted her life for his, was sick. He wrote at once to a faithful friend of the Countess:—“I beg you to tell her how full my prayers are of her. But while I pray much for her recovery, which I desire with all my heart, I cannot feel much

sorrow at a possible result which would give everlasting rest and happiness to a soul so upright, so charitable, so devoted."

On Feb. 20, he received news of her death, and wrote another letter:—

"Whoever knew this soul well must deeply feel her loss; and I confess I am sorry not to have met her again on earth. But how can we fail to find comfort when we think of all the gifts of grace that God intrusted to the keeping of her faithful and generous heart? I should envy her lot, if the happiness of knowing that she is free from the heavy chains of life and confirmed for ever in the love of God, did not master every other thought.

"However pure and holy a soul may have been to our eyes, it is possible that she still has need of our prayers and help before God. Hence we do and will pray. I have informed F. General of Mme. Albert's wish; it touched him, and he commissioned me to let it be known that he would exactly comply with her pious desires, by applying for her, as he had done for her father-in-law, a good number of the fifteen or eighteen hundred Masses which he disposes of weekly.

"People will, no doubt, make free to ascribe this early death to her way of living, to the privations she endured, the direction she followed. To this I have nothing to answer, and, on this point at least, I shall expect the judgment of God with confidence. I make no account of the gossip that goes on; the judgment of all the earth is as nothing in my eyes. The Gospel ought to be our law and guide.

"We shall feel the want of this charitable and generous soul for many different works, for the relief of miseries of many kinds. She was always sure to be ready to make any sacrifice; the thirst to do good consumed her; and if we want to find a

reason for her being lost to time, we must remember that God, in the warmth of His love, sometimes chooses a holy victim."

F. de Ravignan knew better than any one how well Mme. de la Ferronnays had deserved to be called a holy victim by her whole life ; but he did not know that she had deserved it above all by her death. This was well ; for with his constant and burning desire to go to God, it would have been too great a blow to be ransomed from the tomb, and ransomed at the price of such a sacrifice. Scarcely had the victim fallen when the Apostle recovered. There will be four years of health, and then a new danger will be averted by a new holocaust.

At the end of his letter of Feb. 20, 1848, F. de Ravignan added a line on the latest news at Rome :—"On waking yesterday," he said, "I found the world had undergone one more change. Constitutions everywhere ! That of Rome is being drawn up."

Just at this time Paris was much prompter ; it got up a hasty Revolution between one day and another, and the State went to rest a Kingdom and awoke a Republic. At this thunder-clap, overturning one throne and menacing all others, F. de Ravignan exclaims, "What lessons we are learning ! but what puzzles they are ! Let us adore God's hand and pray." This note is dated still from Rome on March 8 ; eight days afterwards we have another from Civita-Vecchia :—"Here I am ; God is bringing me back." In truth, his brethren at Paris had begged him to return, and he had listened to their request. The moment was, of course, critical everywhere, for France was disturbed and made the world shake, but the danger seemed greatest at the very centre of the revolutionary movement.

On his leaving Rome, F. de Ravignan received from the hands of the General a precious token of his fatherly affection ; it was a phial containing blood of St Francis Xavier, with which cherished relic he never parted again. He left Rome alone, but his brethren there were soon to follow him.

The Pontifical Government, unable to stem the waves of the popular movement, let the Jesuits know that it could no longer defend itself. In fact, when the Gesù was deserted, the Vatican soon found itself without its inmate. Providence never ceases to govern the world, even when seeming to leave it to its own passions, and so it came to pass that we shall find F. de Ravignan welcoming to Paris the General who had received him in Rome. The French Republic made noble reparation for the violence of the Roman Republic, and it had the glorious mission of restoring to the Pontiff the seat of his twofold sovereignty, and of opening an asylum to the Society when it had been driven out by all the kingdoms of Europe.





CHAPTER XIV.

RESIDENCE IN THE RUE DE SEVRES.

Revolution of 1848—M. de Chateaubriand on his deathbed retracts parts of his Writings—F. de Ravignan recovers his health at Bièvre—The General of the Society visits Paris—F. de Ravignan Superior of the House in the Rue de Sèvres.



ON the 24th of March 1848, F. de Ravignan arrived in Paris. He allowed himself scarcely time to take breath there. He was impatient to get into a fixed position, and, on April 3, he set out for Belgium to take his orders from obedience; like a dutiful son he put himself in the hands of his Provincial, who was at the College of Brugelette; and on the 6th he re-returned with an appointment to the house in the Rue de Sèvres. Paris had been during February a field of battle, and now it was covered with hustings, where all the parties concerned were trying with their tongues to secure themselves the results of a victory which was gained sword in hand. The return of the well-known orator was hailed as fortunate by the friends of that religious liberty which four years before he had defended with so much eloquence and vigour. They reckoned much on his moral influence, and his presence was a great support to the principal champions of the Catholic

cause; his zeal renewed their spirit, his prudence guided them, and more than once his firmness kept them constant to the cause.

Much, too, had been hoped from his eloquence, and some months later, when his voice was completely restored, he was asked to lend the aid of his persuasive oratory. Holy prelates, zealous priests, had accepted seats in the Assembly where the destinies of France were to be decided; it was wished that the Dominican and the Jesuit who had given glory to the pulpit of Notre-Dame should sit there side by side, and many distinguished men pressed F. de Ravignan to offer himself for election, assuring him of the success of his canvass. An ardent soul, naturally inclined for war, might certainly have found this to be a temptation. But he was stayed by prudence and his Rule. He had read in the Institute:—"All of Ours are commanded, in Virtue of Holy Obedience, and under the most grievous penalties, not to meddle in any way in public affairs which touch matters of State; and let none of them be so hardy and presumptuous as, moved by any prayers and entreaties however urgent, to charge himself with the conduct of political business." He, therefore, remained aloof from the struggle, praying for those who were battling in the field.

Let us see how, ten years later, F. Lacordaire, in a tribute to the memory of F. de Ravignan, described in a few words the noble and saintly attitude he assumed in the midst of the troubles of that terrible time:—"No revolutions disturbed the peace of his devotion; he watched them pass, as the shepherd feeding his flock on the hill looks down on the storms that traverse the plain. While others fled before the thunder-clap, he had no fear for it, and continued his work under God's eye, diffusing around him that security which is pro-

mised to him who lives raised above time. More enthusiasm of courage in danger might have been wished for, but not more constancy at the important post. He gave advice with all his heart; his authority cheered those who advanced farther into the thick of the fight, and if his moderation preserved him in charity, it never led to discouragement."

The whole of F. de Ravignan's correspondence during these stormy years attests the peace, prudence, and unshaken firmness of his soul. We will quote only a few short passages. A fortnight before the outbreak of June, he wrote to F. Roothaan: "We are going God knows where, and there is as yet no appearance of order in the chaos of Europe. Life must be more than ever, I think, an exercise of blind faith. . . . Just now there is calm externally, but we have nothing to assure us that tomorrow will not see an explosion." He understood aright to what he and his brethren were called in the midst of these political catastrophes, and he added in the same letter: "Each of us here busies himself with his own employments; there is no lack of work." Again he wrote to the General on February 5, 1849: "If we are faithful and devoted to God, what have we to fear. Many of our fathers are quite ready to repair to the seat of war and the hospitals, to assist the wounded and the dying."

A week after the June rising, M. de Chateaubriand breathed his last at Paris, in the very midst of his country's agony. This prince of modern French prose, as he has been called, had always cherished in his heart, and manifested openly, the threefold character of a gentleman, a Breton, and a Christian—honour, loyalty, faith. If he had more than once gone astray, at least he had not sunk, and his heart might well gain pardon for his imagination. He constantly attended and warmly admired the Conferences of Notre-Dame, and faith

gave life to the intercourse between the author and the preacher. F. de Ravignan—his zeal redoubled at the sight of death approaching his friend—by his presence and his words gave comfort and courage to the veteran politician and writer now standing on the brink of the grave; beyond the fading poetry of life, beyond the shades of death now almost seeming to lose their darkness, he pointed out the bright, all-important reality, Hope, the daughter of Faith, and that better immortality which is not of this world.

The great writer, brought face to face with eternity, with faculties yet unimpaired, resolved to cut out of his works every page which his conscience rejected. The happiness he felt in tearing them up was some compensation for his grief at having written them. On his deathbed he dictated the following memorandum to his nephew, who put it into our hands:—

I declare before God that I retract every passage in my writings opposed to the faith, to good morals, or to sound principles in general.

PARIS, July 3, 1848.

Signed on behalf of my uncle, Francis de Chateaubriand, who is unable to hold the pen, and agreeably to his request.

GEOFFROY-LOUIS DE CHATEAUBRIAND.

When this declaration had been put in writing, the dying man caused it to be read to him, insisted even on reading it with his own eyes; then with peace in his soul, and joy on his countenance, he passed without a struggle to that God who is ready to pardon and to crown.

When I connect this act of reparation, hitherto unpublished, with the memory of F. de Ravignan, I render to every one his due, giving to God His

own glory, an example to the world, to the dead the honour of Christian penitence, and to the family a reputation higher in the sight of the angels, and not lower in that of men.

This last will has hitherto remained without effect. But the literary heritage of the author of the *Memoirs from beyond the Tomb* no longer belongs to his family.

In the course of July, F. de Ravignan prepared his soul for new labours by a retreat. On its conclusion, M. Récamier observed that his health was still uncertain, and his voice again affected, and resolved to restore to him all the strength his ministry needed. The strong will of the good doctor is still remembered, and he got leave to keep his patient under obedience to him at his country-house in the bracing and retired valley of Bièvre. The busy Paris physician retired to this place for the summer, like a patriarch in the midst of his family; and few visitors were admitted to this Christian household. The house, unpretending in other respects, had a magnificent library, and a handsome chapel, where morning and evening prayers were said in common; and it was a great feast in this house of God when a priest chanced to come to offer the Holy Sacrifice. M. Récamier kept the office of sacristan for himself, and it was a great favour if he gave up to his sons the happiness of serving the priest at the altar.

F. de Ravignan passed some weeks in this family circle, the pious peace of which reminded him of his own community, and, in truth, Bièvre restored him to the pulpit. There was no elasticity in the larynx, nor ring in his voice. But an idea flashed into the boldly-inventive mind of M. Récamier, and speech was restored to F. de Ravignan. One morning, after Mass, at the ordinary hour of assembling for all the inmates of the house, the doctor, with a

grave air, told his family, who were seated at breakfast, that the Father was not so well, and would not join them at the meal. Thereupon he himself went off full of his idea, to find the sick man, and said, "Get up, and follow me." "Well, but where are you to take me?" asked the other. "I am going to throw you into the water." "Into the water!" said F. de Ravignan, "into the water, with cough and fever? But it is all the same; I am in your hands, and must obey you." M. Récamier was about to try the effect of a douche-bath, an heroic remedy, but requiring some nerve. The result was astonishing. At dinner-time the doctor brought in his patient in triumph; his health was restored, and the dumb man of the morning told the story of his cure. This energetic remedy was repeated every day, and the first result of it made permanent—the use of it, painful as it was, long continued an almost daily practice of F. de Ravignan.

A few days after, the chapel at Bièvre was decked with the choicest flowers of the garden, as for a great feast, and for the first time witnessed the abjuration of a Protestant. The conversion had been easily brought about. The lady's upright soul had been sincere in its old belief, and was ready for truth and already Catholic in heart; good faith needs but a single ray of light,—she heard and she believed.

This first ceremonial involved a second. F. de Ravignan had prepared the young convert for Confirmation, as well as another Protestant, who had also become a Catholic; and the saintly Bishop of Versailles, Mgr. Gros, a frequent guest at Bièvre, came to administer the Sacrament to the two neophytes. M. Récamier's house was a suitable spot for this apostolic employment of leisure.

The time of rest passed away with the disease. On the 8th of October F. de Ravignan left his

retirement at Bièvre, and on the 10th he wrote from Paris: "I have returned to my family, and have taken the burden on my shoulders. Let us pray that the spirit of our holy Father may rest upon us." That very day he was named Superior of the house in the Rue de Sèvres.

We saw that in 1843 F. de Ravignan was threatened with this charge, but was able to escape it. In 1846 he again narrowly missed having it laid upon him, but to avoid it he had put forward reasons which seemed sufficient. On this occasion he wrote: "It would be the severest blow ever struck at my very life, that is to say, I should be in fear for the peace of my conscience and the salvation of my soul." But in 1848 he was forced to submit, notwithstanding all his dislike and apprehensions. His correspondence for three years will show us how thorough was his sincerity. On turning over the quarterly letters by which, according to his Rule, he gave the General an account of the state of his house, I find that he speaks of others with the greatest indulgence, while against himself his language is harsh in the extreme, or rather absolutely unjust.

His letters in his quality of Superior begin with the year 1849: "The spirit of all who encircle me is truly religious and good; this in some degree counterbalances the miserable shortcomings of a miserable Superior. If I am a burden to others, I am still more so to myself." In another letter of the same year, he says, "The spirit of our house is good, in spite of the hindrances I too really put in the way."

In January 1850 he wrote a New-Year's letter to the General: "As Superior of the little house in the Rue de Sèvres, as the most unworthy of your children, I offer you our good wishes, our respects, our grateful obedience. The feast of your Patron, St John, did not pass without reminding us of all

we owe you ; and we beg grace of the Sacred Heart that we may do and accomplish fully all that your Paternity desires of us. Doing this, we are sure to be working for God's glory, for which favour we thank the Heart of our Divine Master. Our little community is going on not badly. The spirit is good, the observance of rule satisfactory, zeal as it should be, and the labour not without fruit. I see nothing but the necessary weakness of our wretched nature. I offer great hindrance to all good, but God by His grace supports both works and persons."

In 1851 he explained some of the temporal difficulties of the house, and added, "These are certainly thorns, but after all not very sharp ; a much greater trial to my own soul and to our Fathers is, that I have the office of Superior in conjunction with a great weight of business and correspondence. Still I hesitate to ask to be set free before my time ; God keeps me back from this, I fancy. Be so good, Very Reverend Father, as to bless your poor child—he needs it."

At length, in 1852, F. de Ravignan heard that the Society had listened to the request he feared to make, and had given him a successor. He was then at Amiens ; the Bishop of that city, Mgr. de Salinis, afterwards Archbishop of Auch, who honoured him with his friendship, had prevailed on him to attend and give the sermon at the Diocesan Synod. At the first news of his deliverance he could not control the transport of his joy, and he wrote the two following letters. The first bears date on Sept. 29, and is addressed to the General :—

"VERY REVEREND FATHER,—Accept the expression of my deep gratitude for the kindness with which you have agreed to F. Provincial's relieving me of a burden I bore so ill. I thank God, whose Providence extends over all things,

that He has given a new Superior to our dear house. He will set right what I did wrong, cure the ills caused by my harshness of character. At the bottom of my heart and conscience I feel the deepest regret for having been so bad a servant of our Lord and the Society. Yet I can assure you that I love the Society, my Mother, more than ever; that I am thoroughly devoted to it, and that I would gladly suffer and die for it, to benefit my brethren and souls; and that if I am not able to fill a post giving authority over others, yet placed in some humbler position, which we all do well to prefer, I shall never cease to beg God to make me thankful for my vocation, and for the indulgent kindness of my Superiors.

"I confess that I have often wished to be discharged from my office; I was wrong, for this feeling resulted from the great defects of my character, which I have not yet done my best to subdue. What can I do now? Humble myself, I suppose, pray and obey; this I am thoroughly determined to do to my utmost, with God's grace.

"Pardon and bless your child, Very Reverend Father. Beyond hearty repentance, my soul feels nothing but peace, confidence, and even joy."

A few days after, at the beginning of October, F. de Ravignan wrote as follows to one of his late subjects who had just been named as his successor:—

"REVEREND FATHER,—According to what F. Provincial told me on leaving, our Lord and the Society will to-day, a few hours hence, place on your shoulders the burden of being Superior. I feel compelled to write, to offer you my deep respect, affection, and obedience.

"My dear Father, you know me only too well, and I cannot, must not check a feeling of hearty

sorrow when I think that my sins, my pride, my harshness and impatience, have certainly led to the resolution, for which none but you can grieve, which has relieved me and the rest from the burden of my government, to lay it upon you. Prostrate before our Divine Master and before you, I confess my faults and beg for pardon, beseeching my sweet, tender Mother the Society, to whom I have given so much sorrow, to bear with me, to carry me still, unworthy child as I am, in her piteous bosom.

“Blessed Father, you read the bottom of my soul ; you know that I lie not, that I love and cling to you, that I love God my Saviour through all my sufferings.

“May this day, these years bring you happiness ; may no trouble disturb the pious gladness of your heart ; may I be docile and humble, charitable and faithful, and so deserve at least to be looked on by you with loving compassion ; this is my wish, the desire of my heart ; my prayers, poor but sometimes warm, shall be all offered for you, the father in whom my soul must henceforth find her rest.

“As soon as I come to Paris, I will ask an opportunity of opening my heart to you more fully than ever ; the faithful account I shall render of my conscience will, in your hands, be my stay and security against myself.

“Bless, then, and pardon me, accept, conduct, and save me ; I will always make your will, your smallest desire, my own. Have you not been the means by which God has given me relief and favour ? have I not been enabled through you to breathe sometimes a purer, calmer air ? My dear Father, I shall hasten as soon as possible to throw myself into your arms, on to your heart.”

As we have seen the severity with which F. de Ravignan judged himself in regard to the duties of his office, truth requires that we should speak more

justly of his administration. Let us begin by calling to mind the chief qualities which St Ignatius wishes to find in a superior ; afterwards we shall see to what extent F. de Ravignan attained or fell short of this ideal.

First of all, the superior of a single house, no less than the General who governs the whole Society, must have the closest possible union with our divine Lord, he must cultivate familiarity with Him not only in the time of prayer, but during all the rest of the day, and in all his actions ; in order that by drawing spiritual graces from the Source of all good, he may pour them out abundantly on his subjects, and become for them the conduit in which flow the gifts of Heaven.

Secondly, the superior ought to have attained such perfection that his example may help the rest in the practice of all virtue ; that all may see in him a glowing love for his neighbour and the Society ; that his humility may render him beloved by God and man.

In the third place, he must be free from all disordered affections, all of which he must with God's grace have quelled and mortified ; for fear that they might disturb the judgments his reason should pass, and in order that he may have such exterior composure, and especially such control over his tongue, that nothing in him, not even his words, may give disedification to any, whether to the Brethren, whose model he ought to be, or to strangers.

The fourth requisite is, that while he is kind and mild, he must have that unbending character and strictness which are indispensable to prevent his allowing himself to be turned aside from what he judges to be most acceptable to our Lord God. But he must be able to compassionate his sons as need arises, in such sort that even those whom he is forced to reprove and correct, while they feel pain in

the lower part of the soul, may yet recognise that he is right and charitable in the execution of his office.

Fifthly, he must have a great soul and strength of character to be able to support the weaknesses of many dependants, to undertake great things in God's service, and to persevere in them, if need be, with constancy ; not allowing himself to be cast down by contradiction, even if it come from the great ones of the world and men of power, not turning aside, on account of any entreaties or menaces of theirs, from what is required by reason, and the obedience due to the Lord, so that he may show himself to be raised above all events here below, and may not be exalted in prosperity nor cast down by adversity, but may be ready to face death, if need be, for the good of the Society in obedience to Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sixthly, he must have excellent understanding and judgment, that these gifts of heaven may not fail him when the occasion comes, whether on points of speculation or of practice. And although learning be very necessary for him who is set over so many other learned men, yet the need is still greater of prudence and practical experience in the things of spiritual and interior life, that he may be able to discriminate the source of movements of souls, and give spiritual counsels and remedies fitted to all their necessities and maladies. The gift of discernment in exterior business, the way of managing matters of such various descriptions, and of dealing with so many persons of different characters, whether within the Society or beyond its limits, are in the highest degree necessary.

Lastly, he will have particular need of watchfulness in conducting business, of care in setting it on foot, and determination in finishing and perfecting it, for fear that, by his carelessness or want of courage, the business remain incomplete and imperfect.

Now we do not pretend that we discover in F. de Ravignan every point which occurs in this ideal portrait of a perfect Superior. To find it completely realised in one man, we must go back to the days of St Ignatius and St Francis Borgia. But if the Religious whose life we are writing was not faultless, all who knew him are aware that he possessed in an eminent degree most of the qualities which the Founder of the Society wished to see; and to begin with humility, who can avoid loving and revering a superior whose own judgment of himself was so severe?

Let us enter into some details; and without confining ourselves to following the Institute step by step, let us begin with what will most bring out his natural infirmities.

In the discussion and conduct of business especially, the whole character of F. de Ravignan came out. Before he acted or put orders on others, he undoubtedly reflected on the matter, asked the opinions of others, and, above all, prayed; but these prudent preliminaries being gone through, he unhesitatingly gave the decision which he was never known to revoke, cutting all the Gordian knots by a Yes or a No, and the conclusion arrived at was at once executed. He had no longer any eyes for obstacles, any ears for objections, nor attention for dislike; he walked forward, and made all others keep step with him. There might be good Religious who had not all his strength of mind and self-renouncement. A little more sweetness of manner in the demands made by his virtue might perhaps have been sometimes desirable. He would have condescended more to the weaknesses of his subjects, had he esteemed them less. In his own heart he found nothing that needed to be resisted except excess of vigour, and he did not always sufficiently enter, in the case of others, into natural

weaknesses of which he had no experience. It was chiefly when he reflected on what was wanting to him in this respect that he would so bitterly reproach himself, and pronounce himself unfit to be Superior.

The administration of the house by F. de Ravignan bore, and was sure to bear, marks of his firm, decided character. Near to our own times as he still is, I seem already to be looking at him from afar, like one of those grand stern faces which are now no longer met with. Authority was stamped upon his features, every element and attribute of authority was there, perfect and expressed in all its fulness. If the balance was sometimes inclined, nature and principle alike drew it in the direction of severity rather than kindness; and at the end of his life, as at the end of his noviciate, he was convinced that if vigour causes restraint, it at least secures from evil, while a softer disposition introduces dissolution and corruption, under pretence of slackening the rein, and he chose rather to have the appearance of rigidity than of feebleness.

F. de Ravignan, in his office of Superior, regarded himself as depositary of the Rule and as guardian of his subjects' souls, answerable for the observation of the former, and the salvation of the latter. He loved discipline jealously, and took little pains to flatter his subjects so long as he saved them from fault, and he held it for a maxim that fear must never be totally absent, even when love is present; and he never failed in his duty of correction, as a necessary sanction of law, whereby an admonition prevents some transgression, or penance repairs a fault.

This sternness of principle was in practice compensated and much softened by modifications. Thus he gave no place, no influence, to regard for personal feeling,—a thing hateful in a Superior. If he seemed to exact much, this was only for

God's sake, in support of the Rule, and for the spiritual good of his subjects.

Again, in comparison with his severity against himself, F. de Ravignan had nothing but indulgence for others ; at least, he was the first to observe whatever he was obliged to prescribe. He excused himself from no rule, no common duty, no toil, no penance ; the only privilege he derived from his office, was the duty of edifying his brethren, and the burden of being their servant.

We never met a more lofty character than his ; and we never found a larger heart, with deeper affections, more tender delicacy, more generous and devoted. Self-denial freed him from all care for his own interests, and all his thoughts, all his plans, had reference to the happiness and good of his brethren. With all his firmness, a yet greater degree of sensibility was found in the bottom of his heart ; when any danger or trial occurred which did not touch himself, still he showed trouble and uneasiness, becoming sorrowful with the sorrowful, and suffering with the sick ; and his readiness to impute afflictions that came on his brethren to his own shortcomings made him all the more ready to take a share of all. He seriously believed that in virtue of a kind of solidarity, often found in families, he drew misfortune upon his brethren ; and on this point the humble Superior was completely blinded, and never used his reason.

His great care for the health and cheerfulness of his subjects made him wish to see them take rest after labour, and he gave himself no peace unless he secured them, every fortnight at least, a few hours of relaxation, which was always well earned and well timed, because it came between two tasks, two periods of toil. He was prompted in this by the example of the Founder of the Society, of whom we read : " St Ignatius had a pretty and convenient

house built at Santa Balbina, outside Rome, where the sick could sometimes go to get fresh air, and the young men find relaxation from their studies every week. Some persons remarked that it would be better to save some money, and that it was no time for building when they could scarcely live. The Saint replied that he preferred to secure the health of the least in the house to all the treasures of the world."

F. de Ravignan had long indulged in dreams of a country house, but he had no need to call on the Procurator of the house to make such a sacrifice. Charity came to his relief. A small house, with a walled garden, standing in one of those avenues which encircle the Palace of Versailles with long lines of verdure, had just been left to the diocese as a place of retirement for infirm priests. One only availed himself of it; and the Bishop of Versailles, Mgr. Gros, was kind enough to offer us its use provisionally, until some permanent arrangement could be made. The vacant infirmary accordingly served as the Jesuit villa, until it was turned into a convent of Capuchins; and twice a month during the fine weather all repaired to Versailles.

This expedition was at first optional, but the Superior deemed it his duty to make it obligatory; for the zeal of some so constantly furnished them with reasons for staying behind that nothing short of an order was needed. This enforced rest was sure soon to repay to labour the little time it took from it. The good priest who was their solitary host was sure to be pleased when the community visited him in his solitude, and cheerfully made himself one of Ours for a day, or rather for a portion of a day.

F. de Ravignan was always happy when his brethren were enjoying themselves, and took pleasure in doing the honours of his borrowed villa, giving repeated invitations to our Fathers

of the Rue des Postes and the Rue Lafayette, to come and share in what their Brethren from the Rue de Sèvres enjoyed, and to add to the numbers and the pleasure. At this time, too, when exiles were flocking to Paris from all our provinces throughout Europe, he was glad to give them a holiday on their way, with a family feast and family talk, and to show them the vast magnificent park and the royal palace, which was then the Museum of France.

This is the proper place to mention the loving hospitality of F. de Ravignan shown to this crowd of exiles. He gave attention to every point, forestalled their smallest wishes, and his greeting was courteous and familiar, giving proof of his gentlemanly breeding.

On October 28, F. Roothaan arrived in Paris with F. de Villefort who accompanied him throughout his exile, and with a good Lay Brother who was appointed to attend them ; they stayed at the Rue de Sèvres. No successor of St Ignatius had crossed the Alps for two centuries. Nothing but the persecuting spirit of Revolution could tear a General of the Society from Rome. He spent his time in short visits to all his houses throughout Europe.

F. de Ravignan had been Superior only twenty days, and he hardly knew what sufficient welcome to give to the father and friend of his soul. He insisted that his own room should be hallowed by the residence of his revered guest ; in that room he was to die. During his short stay, Father General addressed all his children together, saw each of them in private, and blessed them before he went. On the 2d of November he left Paris for the West.

This reminds me of another little circumstance which showed F. de Ravignan's delicacy. He had no greater enjoyment than to serve or give pleasure

to others ; but he used all his skill to hide himself from their gratitude. On this occasion he asked and obtained a favour for two of his Brethren, of which they had no hope nor even thought, and he never gave them any hint of his having interfered. For both of them, the time of pronouncing their last vows was still distant, and the day for the ceremony was fixed by custom. F. de Ravignan took advantage of the presence of F. General to point out to him the precariousness of the times ; and his request based on this ground procured a dispensation for the ceremony to take place before the full time and on an unusual day. On the 8th of December 1848, the two Religious took their vows before the Provincial F. Rubillon, assisted by F. de Ravignan, with M. Mollevaut and Baron Cauchy for witnesses. They were destined afterwards to pay unwittingly the debt of gratitude which they had as unwittingly incurred ; they were both among those admitted to assist and pray with him in his last moments.

F. de Ravignan took a leading position in the community, less through the dignity of his office than through his personal influence and the charm of his conversation. When he was present, there was no resisting him, he drew all to himself. None could escape the attraction of his religious and gracious manners, his ease and politeness in his intercourse with others, his unaffected cheerfulness and the interest of his conversation. His language was simple, yet imposing ; without intending or even suspecting what he was doing, he riveted the attention and secured the silence of all.

F. de Ravignan's character came out chiefly in his more confidential intercourse ; by it he was best understood and valued ; by penetrating to his heart, his affectionate and open disposition became known ; the warm devotion of his many

friends then ceased to be astonishing. In order to withdraw the veil which hid some of his sensibility from those who did not know him so well, we will here give one of the outpourings of his heart in all the ease of a brotherly correspondence. Through exceptional circumstances which furnished no precedent, he had chanced to pass two or three days with his noble friend the Count Molé; the day after reaching Champlatreux, on Oct. 8, 1850, he wrote to one of his subjects:—

“REVEREND FATHER,—I feel that I must write to you, and I am glad to obey this impulse of my heart; or, as I should be more grateful and more truthful in saying, this impulse of God, Who would give me this balm to soothe my miseries.

“I left Paris yesterday, without seeing or taking leave of you; it had been settled with F. Provincial that I should tell no one where I was going. But you, my dear Father, are no one, and yet you are everything to me. In my sorrow I fancy that I have been severe, over severe to myself in denying myself the pleasure of saying a word to you. To-day I can no longer refrain.

“How grieved I am to think that instead of being good with you, giving you relief and comfort, I am nothing but a painful burden and cross. I know that in your great charity you excuse me; but I do not excuse myself for adding so much to your trouble, when I ought to be your guardian and support, your friend and assistant. Your merit will be the greater before God; but I ought not to have given you this sort of opportunity of meriting. And yet, you must understand clearly, you are necessary, indispensable, to me. When I lose your dear company, the remembrance of you remains and cheers me. You put my poor soul in the presence of a child of God, a friend of our

Lord, yourself, I mean; and in this my well-founded grief finds solace. My dear Father, do not grow weary of bearing with me, excuse the sour ill-natured outbreaks of which I am guilty.

“Obedience and reason caused me to come here. I was summoned by urgent, pious, affectionate letters. F. Provincial thought that religious courtesy absolutely required that an exception should be made, (of which no one but he knows, and now you.)

“The exceedingly great confidence and affection shown by M. Molé fills one with confusion. Surrounded by wealth and dignity, in a mansion worthy of a king, with all the polish of manner and language to be expected in a statesman who has governed a great country, or in one of the feudal aristocracy of the old stamp, he is almost as simple and good as you. His mind would suit yours well. To-day we had a walk together of three hours or more; he told me much of his interior life, and put me questions on mine. I did not tell him everything; but he must be told how much I love you, and what tender affection and hearty esteem you deserve.

“After all, I continue to feel perfectly indifferent towards everything by which I am here surrounded. But it does me good to see this family, this noble and illustrious old man, so pious, good, and simple; it withdraws me from my deep sorrows, and serves well to divert my mind. And the country does me good, with its peace so different from my poor heart. I fancy that I shall soon be able to pray. And, besides, I never lose your influence.

“I shall stay here over to-morrow, Wednesday, close to the room where Louis XIII. and Louis XIV. slept, and where Louis-Philippe held a Cabinet Council. I shall reach home again, I hope, on Thursday, at eleven o'clock, then I will speak to you of another

altogether spiritual plan for the latter half of October. Here is an end of my paper, but not of my thoughts of you nor of my affection. In union with your Holy Sacrifices," &c.

Having thus shown F. de Ravignan's energy and charity in the duties of his office, we will speak of his prudence and vigilance.

While in Paris he was always overwhelmed with business. The interviews he was called on to give were innumerable ; and every single day had its appointed task, by which it was completely occupied ; any delay left formidable arrears for the morrow. During the hour of consideration which the Institute orders for Superiors, he was able to foresee in the morning all that awaited him throughout the day.

After drawing near to God by prayer, immediately followed by Mass and Office, long before the world, with its late hours, could assault and distract him, at about half-past six in the morning, he formed a plan for the day, with all its many details of business ; the affairs of the house, personal questions, but above all whatever promoted the interests of religion and the works of apostolic zeal. He compared the actual state of things with the ideal traced in the rules, he thought over all the different offices, allotted to the Priests and Lay Brothers their spiritual or manual employs, arranged the notices to be given and the steps to be taken on every subject. At seven o'clock the Minister came to take his orders for the internal business of the house ; and, shortly after, one of the Brothers received instructions as to external matters. This done, he was ready for the work of the ministry.

A care which never slept, and an experience which seldom failed, must be added to this picture. No one remembers seeing F. de Ravignan careless, or knowing him distracted. It is said that men

gifted with genius suffer distraction, but that men of character are free from it. In his nature and will there was a superabundance of energy, which expended itself without becoming exhausted, which was able to embrace an entire subject, without being absorbed by any one detail. He had an eye ever open, thoughts ever on his subject; not that he wearied himself by forced attention, but the weight of responsibility made him scrupulously careful. He demanded of himself the account which he was some day to render to God.

F. de Ravignan's experience of the world gave him a practical acquaintance with the business of material life not often found in a Religious. It will scarcely be believed that his care extended to the household economy, going down to the minutest details of expenditure. He loved clearness, and could not endure any sort of confusion; debts weighed on him like a reproach of conscience, and he had no rest until he had shaken off the load. He was not satisfied unless all the purchases of the house were paid for with ready money, and he showed little uncasiness at having nothing for the future, so long as he knew that the past was clear.

When we remember the degree in which F. de Ravignan was drawn to prayer, his love for retreat, and his use of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius which he made twice a-year and which he studied unceasingly, we may easily understand that he derived his prudence from the purest source, from God Himself. He was in a high degree a man of reason and of faith, and he believed that these two lights alone illumined a soul in this life. Worldly considerations, merely human sense, or impressions derived from nature, were not allowed a voice in his deliberations. He was never caught uttering a word dictated by flattery and not by conviction, nor doing an act from interest and not

from duty. His imagination was something to keep in check, his passions something to subdue. His thoroughly southern disposition broke out occasionally with some vivacity, but the religious calm that succeeded proved the mastery held over nature.

To complete this parallel between F. de Ravignan and the pattern of a Superior drawn by St Ignatius, nothing remains but to show that he possessed that greatness of mind and devoted charity which is ready, on call, to face death in the service of the Society, and for the salvation of souls.

In the spring of 1849 the cholera was raging in Paris, and this time the force of the epidemic was concentrated in a few scattered points of the suburbs. F. de Ravignan was Superior at the time, and most anxious to offer the services of himself and his community in helping the cholera patients; the offer being accepted by the Archbishop of Paris, F. de Ravignan was the first to establish himself in the Salpêtrière, where the mortality was greatest, wishing hereby to set an example and to organise the work.

One of the chaplains had already fallen a victim to his devotion; the Jesuits of the Rue de Sèvres, who came to their assistance, relieved one another successively in these chambers of misery, where nothing was seen but death-struggles and deaths. Three other Jesuits, from the Rue des Postes, rendered like services for six weeks at the Hospice de la Pitié. Some very sharp-sighted people soon saw the calculations of ambition in this zeal; it was actually imagined that the Society aimed at winning the management of the Salpêtrière to itself. On account of these prejudices, F. de Ravignan changed his plan, but still carried on the good work. Fear had been inspired by the presence of more than one Jesuit; for the future he sent only one Father, and constantly the same. We will give the

simple account of the matter he sent to Rome in the July of that year: "F. Dabbadie readily undertook the work of attending first at the Salpêtrière and afterwards at the Hôpital Saint-Louis to give spiritual assistance to the cholera patients. He spent in these duties about two months in the whole, and performed them very well. Our forwardness to help the Hospital Chaplains seems to have given pleasure to the Archbishop." It will be observed that he does not say a word about himself.

I am glad to find here the name of F. Dabbadie coming from the pen of F. de Ravignan. The diocese of Paris had given him to the Society, and he fought the battles of the Lord with us with joy, when he was summoned to leave the service of the cholera patients to serve criminals and transports. One day his Superior said to him, "My dear Father, you are to go to Cayenne." "I shall be most happy, Reverend Father," was his cheerful reply. He went and took his share of toil; and soon, like many of his Brethren, the happiest and most envied of all in the Society, after voluntarily enduring for the sake of God and of souls, exile, the company of convicts, the unchecked force of a sultry climate, and all the perils of the fevers of the tropics, he fell in his turn, and breathed his last thanking the Lord for his vocation. Tears were shed over his grave by the prisoners in whose service he died.

In the remaining part of this history, which is devoted to the last ten years of F. de Ravignan's life, his virtue and apostolic labours will come before us with new lustre; his life of self-denial will be rewarded by a holy death; and the triumphal procession of his funeral will hear the public voice and spontaneous homage of a whole people proclaim his zeal and his sanctity far more loudly than it could be extolled by us.



CHAPTER XV.

MISCELLANEOUS DISCOURSES.

F. de Ravignan reappears in the Pulpit—Homilies on the Passion at St Thomas of Aquin—Last two Retreats at Notre-Dame—Mission to London—Connection with the Catholics of England.



HE apostolate of F. de Ravignan, which began with his return to Paris in 1848, was less brilliant than his earlier career, but not less toilsome, and certainly more fruitful. It is as the harvest coming after seed-time, itself often bringing with it exhausting labour, and sorrow even to death. That this follower of Jesus may save souls, he must himself endure his agony, and remain upon the cross. He will cease from suffering and from working conversions only when he ceases to live. We shall exhibit the remainder of his apostolic life in a series of pictures, following the order of matter rather than that of date. The various ministrations which occupied the last ten years of his life were simultaneous, and present no breaks. It has thus been necessary that the various facts bearing on the same subject should be collected into groups, with no other divisions than such as are afforded by the titles. On this account we have already studied F. de Ravignan as a

Superior between 1848 and 1851, reserving for this and the following chapters all account of the apostolic works out of doors which occupied him during the same laborious years.

Before we describe the return of F. de Ravignan to the pulpit after his recovery, we must notice a remarkable change which took place at this time in his mode of preaching. He no longer wrote any of his sermons; he no longer had the leisure to do so, nor the need. It was said by some that he was wanting in proper respect for his former reputation when he exposed it to all the risks of extempore speaking. For my part I know of nothing more noble than this high-minded disdain of renown, and, provided he were at the end of his course more humble and more apostolic, I should feel no regret to see him less eloquent.

After all his study and his practice in the pulpit he had amassed sufficient materials and secured sufficient credit to ensure his being always ready and always giving satisfaction. A time of recollection and prayer was enough to enable him to speak with an air of conviction and with clearness on every subject, whether dogmatic, moral, or connected with spiritual science. He commonly employed the time of passing through the streets in this interior preparation, for his mind was as calm amidst the crowds of a great city as in the solitude of his room. Moreover, scarcely one among his hearers would ever suspect that he was listening to an extempore discourse. Fitting proportions were observed throughout, both in matter and form; ideas and sentiments were linked together in natural sequence, and the precise expression came from his lips with fluency. In a word, he was not less elegant than before, and perhaps he showed more warmth. And forgetful as he was of his personal interests, he never was be-

trayed into carelessness. He felt reverence for his ministry, respect for his hearers. Thus he never for a moment lost his popularity, and popularity is an effect which sometimes has a cause.

The first beginnings of F. de Ravignan's resuming the ministry of the Word in 1849 were some instructions and retreats given in private chapels, and then some sermons in churches on particular occasions. In the course of this year he delivered sermons on behalf of charitable institutions at the Madeleine in Paris, at Amiens, Orleans, Tours, Havre; at Poitiers he gave the panegyric on St Hilary, and he preached at Bruges on occasion of the solemn celebration held every century of the relic of the Holy Blood. His voice had lost something of its range, but its quality was unaltered; and with the assistance of his marked articulation, it still reached to a great distance. When once his strength had been tested, he undertook stations properly so called.

On every Friday of the Lent of 1850, he preached on the Passion at St Thomas of Aquin. His first appearance in Paris was in the same church, and had been followed by ten years of preaching and several years of silence. A great crowd gathered to hear him. It was necessary early in the day to place soldiers to keep guard at the doors. The Rue Saint-Dominique and the other adjoining streets were lined by a double row of carriages, and a fashionable audience filled the nave and aisles, overflowed into the choir, covered the altar-steps, and choked up the doorways. The person whom this assemblage were waiting for, came thinking over his subject, and as calm as if he had no business on hand; and on the conclusion of a thoroughly apostolic address, he went away, thinking as little of the admiration expressed as if he had not spoken a word.

The following year the preacher undertook a course of homilies on the Passion on each Friday in Lent at the Cathedral. But the ministration which he had most at heart was his dear Notre-Dame Retreat, as he always called it. Providence allowed him two more opportunities of spending on it the remnant of his strength. F. Lacordaire was now again in possession of the pulpit of Notre-Dame, but, following the unerring instinct of true genius, and out of regard to the founder of the Retreats, he confined himself to Conferences. It might seem that Heaven so arranged it, in order to mark the brotherly spirit of these two apostolic labourers, that, after succeeding each other in their enterprise, they finally worked together. Thus in 1850 and 1851, the great pulpit had all it could desire; in the Conferences the splendid talent of the son of St Dominic enlightened the understandings of men, and in the Retreat their hearts were moved by the resistless zeal of the son of St Ignatius.

I have found but one report concerning his work written by F. de Ravignan during these two years; it is so brief and modest as to deserve to be quoted: "The Retreat of Notre-Dame has been just what it was four years ago. By the unmistakable assistance of God, my health has borne the labour of this preaching very well. Grace has been much felt, and has wrought some cheering and notable conversions."

In speaking of the Retreat of 1851, I must not omit to mention a circumstance which we shall find of some importance hereafter. On Good Friday, April 18, the Prince President of the Republic resolved to be present at the sermon on the Passion, and to honour the holy relics preserved in the Cathedral. The Princess Mary of Baden, who was then Marchioness of Douglas, and now Duchess of Hamilton, a cousin of Prince Louis Napoleon, was to accom-

pany him, as well as the Ministers and other Officers of State. F. de Ravignan did not hear of this intention until quite the last moment, when he received official notice from his brother-in-law, the Marshal Exelmans, the Grand Chancellor of the Legion of Honour, who was himself to be of the party; but surprises of this sort gave him no disturbance. Before setting out he went as usual to one of his brethren, who was to be his companion, and told him the news. He was seldom more accessible than when he was going to preach, and the Father asked him whether he felt nervous. He answered cheerfully, "What have I to be afraid of? You know I do not care about success;" and, smiling very kindly, he added, "I do not want to think of anything but the pleasure of having you with me." And the companion actually was with him throughout. The only way he found to get into the Cathedral and find a place, was to follow the preacher into the sacristy, mount the pulpit-stairs with him, and sit at his feet. The orator spoke as one that knew the world, loved souls, and adored the Cross. When the President of the Republic had come to be Emperor, he did not forget that he had heard F. de Ravignan.

I shall make only a passing mention of the Advent stations in the Cathedral of Amiens in 1850, and in that of Orleans in 1851; they were not much spoken of beyond these places. The preacher did not discontinue his residence in Paris; he left that city on Sunday morning, prepared his discourse in the train, and on Monday morning was again at his post.

The principal scene of the exercise of F. de Ravignan's zeal in 1851 was London. His Eminence Cardinal Wiseman, at the request of the English Catholics, had secured his services for a series of discourses during the Great Exhibition.

The opportunity had seemed favourable; amid the crowd of visitors it had been hoped that the orator of Notre-Dame would have been able to exercise his zeal with fruit. But how could a single voice make itself heard through the uproar? The main current ran towards the Crystal Palace, rather than towards the Hanover Square Rooms or the church in Hill Street.

On April 30, F. de Ravignan wrote:—"We got here yesterday quite safe and tolerably early. While crossing the Channel I lay down in the open air on the deck; there was none of the terrible seasickness. By four in the morning we were at Dover. In London good F. Brownbill received us with extraordinary kindness. What a beautiful church our Fathers have got! There is nothing wanting—it is a perfect gem, and in the best Gothic taste. To-morrow I shall give my first sermon there in honour of the Month of Mary, and on Sunday in the Concert Room. I am quite having a rest here."

In a letter of May 7, I read:—"What have I to say about London? Really I do not know much of what is going on, and trouble myself very little about it. My humble ministry, some intercourse with converts, prayer, that is what fills up my time. I have not once seen the Exhibition: some good Catholics come to call on me, and give me edification; that is all I want.

"I have already preached twice; first, on May 1, for the beginning of the Month of Mary in our Fathers' church, and again in the Concert Room, which, on Sundays, is turned into a church. It is said that the congregation that will come to these Rooms will be the larger, and will include some Protestants.

"So I shall preach twice a week, on Sunday at Hanover Square, and on Wednesday in our Fathers'

church. But who am I, and what can I do? I shall go on as well as I can; pray for me constantly.

“This city is really the modern Babylon, perfectly frightful for its size, population, and noise. So farewell; to suffer and die would be my wish.”

On the 20th. of May we have another letter:—
“What must I say about my humble ministry? There is a good attendance at the instructions. I am in communication with some souls whom grace is drawing, but I do not see any very appreciable results. Beg of the Sacred Heart of our divine Master, that my weaknesses may not prove a hindrance. After all, is it not right to do all we can, and throw ourselves into the hands of God through Mary? Only let my poor words succeed in giving comfort to a single troubled soul, and I am too well recompensed.

“In this city, Bishops, Priests, and Religious, must by custom mix in society, and go out to dinner parties. This is a great change, externally at least, in the life of a Jesuit, who for thirty years has been shut up in a community, and subjected to the holy requirements of his Rule. It seems universally agreed that this mixing with the world, even with the Protestant world, is advantageous. So I am obliged every evening to join a crowd of fashionable people, after one of these great English dinners, which last from eight to ten at night. Thanks to God I remain quite indifferent under all this, just as if I had never left my room. I am generally much edified by the modest deportment of the English ladies, and their conversation is serious and worthy of a Christian. But it is rather late for me to take up life in the world again. Thus this evening I dine with Cardinal Wiseman; yesterday I dined with Mrs Hope, Walter Scott’s grand-daughter, a recent convert; to-morrow I shall dine with Lord Granville, a Protestant, and

one of the Cabinet Ministers here. It is God's will. I go out, and I come back just as if I had not seen anybody."

In a fourth letter dated on May 29, the preacher spoke of the success of his work with calmness, the fruit of resignation and humility:—"My humble ministry is proceeding; it will soon come to an end. How will it turn out? I do not know. A certain number of Protestants have been constant attendants. Pray that the account I shall have to render may be good. There may be some good done, but how much good remains undone!

"I have had an honour paid me by some Protestant ministers and apostate priests, among others by the notorious Gavazzi; they make speeches, or publish pamphlets, and newspaper articles, not abusing me personally, but on my account attacking the Church, and the Society my Mother. But what with the cold-blooded English character, and the engrossing occupations of the *season*, as it is called here, all this falls still-born. People of the world find their chief business in Court Entertainments and visits to the Exhibition.

"On the whole our little French sermons attract no great attention. May the Lord's will be done. When I think of this I am humbled, but not discouraged, nor made uneasy the least in the world. I cannot but notice that, notwithstanding my great unworthiness, God constantly supports me by His grace. Let us take courage, and endure ourselves. To suffer and die, but without growing weak under the burden, this ought to be our wish and endeavour. The spirit of the Catholics, of long standing, or of short, rises under difficulties and trials. It is a comfort to see this Church of England. I am ready to believe that its future, like everything here below, will abound in obstacles and suffering."

At length, on June 13, F. de Ravignan gave notice that he was returning:—"My mission is coming to an end; there are no marked results. There were too many hindrances in me myself. In my last week I shall give a short retreat in our church in preparation for the Feast of Corpus Christi, for the three days from the 16th to the 19th. There will certainly not be many people, but some pious souls may be profited by it. I was asked to give this short retreat by some Catholic ladies, Lady Arundel, Lady Granville, &c. I have just been giving a Triduum to the nuns of the Sacred Heart, whose convent stands in a charming neighbourhood an hour from London. These three days of spiritual exercises devoted to religious and truly pious persons, gave me great satisfaction.

"I have paid a visit to our fine college at Stonyhurst, two hundred miles from London. I have told you all my news; my plans are as follows:—On June 22 I shall give my last sermon at Hanover Square Rooms. I reckon on starting for France on Monday the 23d. Early on Tuesday the 24th I hope to be at Amiens, and there see our Fathers and the Bishop, and in the evening go over to Saint-Acheul, for my eight days' retreat; I have need of the rest it will be to me. Pray that I may profit by it, according to our Lord's good pleasure.

"The well-known Mr Manning, who was converted not long since, will be ordained priest the day after to-morrow. He has asked me to assist him at his first Mass, which he intends to say in our church on the feast of St Francis Regis; it is a real consolation to me.

"Let us take our rest on the Cross."

F. de Ravignan acted as he had mentioned; on his return to Paris on July 4, after his retreat at Saint-Acheul, he sent the following simple account of his ministry to F. General:—"On returning to

France, I made a retreat at our country-house near Saint-Acheul, and it has rested me. I feel as if I could give myself up into the hands of God and my superiors. I do not, I think, retain any but favourable impressions from my stay in England. Yet I did very little there. But my agreement in heart and mind with our Fathers, the sight of the good they are really doing, my intercourse with the English Catholics, and with some Protestants, have given me constant comfort. May God blot out my faults."

F. de Ravignan says not a word in these letters about some converts whom he received in London. Many other conversions, of which the foundation was laid during his stay in England, were perfected afterwards in Paris. On leaving, he wrote:—"This country has a remarkable character peculiar to itself, in which, by the side of some miserable defects, there are admirable materials." He had observed closely that society, the permanent qualities of which, rather than its freaks of madness, our own would do well to borrow; and he was pleased with the staid, serious cast of opinion, the religious instinct, the respect for authority, for law, and for the public morals, the truly national spirit, the social and domestic virtues, on which Providence has in our days conferred, as on Rome of old, the reward of the sovereignty of the world.

The serious reflections of a French Jesuit on England will be read with interest. We find them given at length in the following letter, sent from London to M. le Comte Molé:—

"Poor France! when I compare it with this country, I am sorry for it in more than one respect. Here at least the foundations of society remain, life is still based on principles and traditions which have their roots in the past. Those politicians who go the farthest, I was assured, would not make any

attack on property, on the landed aristocracy. Here the Government governs ; there is a respect, an instinct inspiring the nation, and upholding the constitution and the laws. It would seem that the frightful errors of socialism have not as yet perverted the working classes.

“ But still, can we feel altogether secure as to the future of this country ? I am not quite sure ; this exaggerated prosperity and material power frightens me. It is impossible to help recognising here some of those threatening outlines which the Holy Scriptures trace so vigorously when speaking of Babylon. Under the peaceful regular exterior there may lurk a sort of intoxication, and how terrible will be the return to consciousness if it take place ! The mind recoils from the thought of the millions upon millions of francs that form the enormous public debt of England. The immense fortunes of the aristocracy are almost all encumbered by debts and charges, which are accumulated without thought. All agree, on the other hand, in saying that the middle class is raising itself to real power ; it includes the living strength of the country, it is intelligent, and wishes to govern. Some wise members of the upper classes blame themselves for having neglected this progress of the middle classes. Among the latter, it would seem that true political principles and religious feeling are not predominant. It will some day, perhaps, exact a terrible reckoning.

“ It is in this class of small tradesmen and farmers that prejudice against Catholicity is most alive. The remarkable religious movement which we have seen in progress in an enlightened portion of English society has not found its way into the middle class. Although the bulk of the people has hitherto been uninfluenced by Catholic action, I was assured that it would in time begin to be affected.

"On the whole, I should believe that religious interests are making real progress in this country. This may be designed by Providence to strengthen the cause of Christianity and society, and to furnish them with supporters. I suppose that the best we can hope to find in the countries of Europe is some elements of resistance to evil and disorder. In considering the matter, I do not see anything better in the future as possible or probable.

"These imperfect impressions which I have gained concerning the country, are only partially based on sufficient data. I have allowed myself to tell you simply the ideas I have formed. Excuse me for having set before you views so little deserving your attention."

F. de Ravignan was in London just at the time of passing of the ill-advised Bill against Ecclesiastical Titles; his stay was embittered by the debates that preceded it, and the excesses that followed. The occasion of the Bill was the recent institution of the Catholic hierarchy, a merely spiritual measure, to which religious intolerance alone could object, and which no way concerned the State nor even the Anglican Church; yet this "Papal Aggression" filled Protestantism with a sudden panic, and stirred it up to fanatical rage. The ribaldry of the streets answered the violent speeches of Parliament; and it seemed as if London had invited all Europe to come and see the wonders of its industry merely to exhibit to it in this nineteenth century a renewal of the excesses of the sixteenth.

The French Religious grieved over this outburst, but felt no alarm at anything so silly and transient. "Really," he wrote, "I am much pained by these scenes in London. We see what these people are, so self-possessed in other matters, and such champions of religious liberty elsewhere! But I have

great hopes in the good sense of the majority; the tempests will be lulled, and the good done will remain. I am firmly convinced that in this land of sound practical sense, principle rightly understood will gain a mastery. In fact, the allotment of titles and districts among the Bishops goes for nothing; it is confined to the spiritual order, and affects Catholics only. What damage did the Anglican Church really sustain? It still keeps its property, its laws, its hierarchy, its royal supremacy. It was merely a question of spiritual organisation. What fault could any one seriously find in it? The danger of the Anglican Church does not come from this; its danger arises wholly from the circumstances of its origin, its separation from the Living Vine, and from the principle of unity."

F. de Ravignan's character suited the English taste excellently. His great talent, and his dignified demeanour, which raised a high opinion of his virtue, were fully appreciated; and he left a high reputation behind him among the London Catholics, and even among those whom heresy prejudiced against him. One of the chief Protestant noblemen of England remarked, after an interview with F. de Ravignan, "He is the most finished gentleman I ever saw."

F. de Ravignan's close connection with England, and his pious correspondence with eminent Englishmen who had gained his friendship, chiefly date from this period. Cardinal Wiseman occasionally wrote to him in Paris to recommend to him some converts, "Who deserve to meet with attention from you, and to receive that good counsel which no one knows how to give better than you." Mr Phillips sent persons over to him from England who had recently been received, or were about to be received, into the Church: Lord Feilding, Lord and Lady Campden, and Dr Anderton, who made

his abjuration at the end of a Retreat at the Rue de Sèvres. Among F. de Ravignan's friends were Dr Manning, Mr Fullerton, and Mr Monsell, M.P. Mr Wilberforce took him as his spiritual director; Mr Allies called on him in Paris more than once, to express his respect, before making his profession of the Catholic faith in London. The Duke of Norfolk and the Earl of Shrewsbury kept up a constant correspondence with F. de Ravignan. Edification will be given, if we are allowed to quote two letters of these representatives of the Catholic aristocracy of England, in order to show what esteem and affection they had for the French Religious. The Duke of Norfolk wrote:—

“MY DEAR FATHER,—I received great pleasure from the mark of kindness you have given me, and I thank you for it with all my heart. The friendship with which you have always honoured me is one of my greatest comforts. Believe me that I am ever devotedly yours.”

The Earl of Shrewsbury wrote as follows:—

“MY DEAR FATHER,—I am constantly thinking of you, I pray for you, and love those who love you and speak of you. Were I not called to another course of life, I should seek the road to heaven among the sons of St Ignatius. But God will not have it so, and may His holy Name be ever blessed.

“Your Fathers in England have declined to accept the house I offered them near my own country residence. I am very sorry for it, for I cannot tell the pleasure it would have given me. But it was not God's will. Your Fathers have done quite right; I should not have wished them, merely to oblige me, to have accepted a house which did

not suit them, and which would have been injurious to the Society. Happily, Catholic priests are never obliging when duty points out to them another course. They are right, and if everybody acted like the Jesuits, all would go well."

F. de Ravignan kept up a much more active correspondence with a lady of princely family, born in Germany but settled in England, and who loved France as the country of her faith and her affections. I have already had occasion to mention the Princess Mary of Baden, Duchess of Hamilton. For political reasons she had, like her sisters, been brought up in the Protestant religion. But in after life they received a threefold grace from Heaven, and all the sisters in succession, the Princess Louisa Wasa the eldest, the Princess Josephine of Hohenzollern Sigmaringen, and the Princess Mary, had the happiness of returning to the faith of their mother.

Providence brought the Duchess of Hamilton into communication with F. de Ravignan. I cannot express the depth of interest which he felt in training this soul, so well adapted for being a Catholic, but so long exposed to such difficulties in making an open profession of the faith. Those who in the world's eyes are most powerful seldom have greatest liberty in dealing with God. F. de Ravignan supported her among the difficulties of her position in a correspondence dictated by his apostolic zeal. Out of the two hundred letters which this lady received from him during seven years, I shall quote one only, which he wrote on the very day of his return to Paris after his visit to London, on July 14, 1851:—

"It is a year to-day since God admitted you into the bosom of His Church. Your upright devoted mind and kind heart made you His peculiar

property. Through all the years of your life, in the midst of trial or joy, His grace blessed you and prepared the help, the light, the strength which lead us to the end, and support us in the practice of Christian virtue. Be trustful then; believe that God shields you with His hand, that He protects and will never abandon you. Let me tell you how much joy I feel in having been chosen by Providence as the instrument of your true happiness. You will, I hope, be assured of my deep and unalterable devotedness."

When F. de Ravignan returned to Paris, he said with a sigh, "I was more at liberty in London. Here I can scarcely breathe, I am so engaged and overwhelmed by business. But it is all well, blessed be God."

I can only mention, without going into details, the works which occupied the last six months of the year 1851. After giving three consecutive retreats, two at Paris and the third at Laval, he preached the sermons for the Synod at Amiens, after which came the Advent station given at Orleans. This was the close of F. de Ravignan's career as an orator; the sickness which attacked him in 1852, as we shall see hereafter, left him no more than strength enough for familiar instructions, addressed to small bodies of hearers.





CHAPTER XVI.

CONVERSIONS.

General Donnadieu—M. Royer-Collard, Professor in the School of Medicine—Prince Paul of Wirtemberg—Baron Walckenaër—M. du Camper, the Naval Officer—General the Duke de Bellune—The Duke de Gramont—Two Actresses.

IN this second stage of the apostolic life of F. de Ravignan, he gathered up, in the tribunal of Penance, the fruit of his preaching. Half his time was devoted to this humble and unostentatious ministry. From the very beginning he arranged the days of the week for confessions on a plan which he followed without change to the last. Throughout the day on Wednesday and Saturday, and on the Sunday morning, he received men in his room. On Tuesday and Thursday afternoons he went to hear the confessions of women, at first in the chapel of the Foundling Hospital in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, and latterly in the chapel of the Sacred Heart in the Rue de Varennes.

It is of course impossible to enter into the secrets of a ministry which is enveloped in impenetrable darkness; but some idea may be formed how zealous, prudent, and profitable it was by means of certain circumstances which were open and public. In this way we know how he converted sinners,

assisted the dying, comforted the afflicted, and gave the pious spiritual direction.

His ambition and his happiness was to secure the elect for heaven. Opportunities came to him more abundantly than to others; his name exercised an attraction; mothers brought their sons to him, sisters their brothers, wives their husbands, friends introduced their friends. But often the priest did not await their applications, but himself went to seek them, made the first advances, tried every means, undismayed either by delays or by refusal, and persevered in hoping against hope. When finally he succeeded in bringing back a stray sheep to the fold, it would be impossible to express the gentleness he displayed. Since God has deigned, as St Augustine says, to be merciful to excess, F. de Ravignan knew well that man can never have sufficient mercy.

We can relate a few circumstances which death has withdrawn from the law of silence, or which have otherwise become the property of the public.

General Donnadieu, a name once well known, and who continued faithful to his early principles, was living at Courbevoie, in the environs of Paris; he had given up political life, and was planning how he could serve with his pen the country which he had before served with his sword. He was a Protestant, but he had fortunately become acquainted with F. de Ravignan, and in such acquaintanceship there was always hope. The Religious began to gain his heart by becoming his friend, and he soon obtained the following formal promise: "I swear that I will die a Catholic." From that time, and even before he actually entered the Church, the aged General gave simple expression to his gratitude and veneration: "I think of you, my dear, good Father; I envy your happiness and peace of mind. You ought, my dear Ravignan, to be thoroughly

happy at being removed out of this world. If the road you take were open to me, how gladly would I enter on it. I trust in God's goodness. I have suffered, suffered much ; my only consolation and hope are in God's mercy. With great admiration and affection I remain entirely yours."

Another day the General wrote again : "I came to see you, my dear Father ; you were occupied with your calm, happy employments. May God keep you thus employed ! What a joy it would be to me if you could give me a part, and share your cares with me. You offer me no more than this world, which is nothing ; and that is all you are able to give me. You have left the bar for the pulpit, but for what can I exchange my sword ?"

As long since as 1846, the old soldier felt an impulse of zeal for the salvation of souls, and, taking his pen, wrote as follows to his friend, the preacher : "Next Monday you are to rain down the Word of God on the throng around you ; this Word of the God of Christians, so powerful in your mouth, will it recall them to their duties ?"

After this opening, he represented the orator as in the presence of a glittering throng, all gathered together in a temple, as in a theatre, to display their luxury and vanity, and he suggested to him not only ideas but even oratorical periods and warm apostrophes. "I beg a thousand pardons for the boldness of a poor sinner like me, born outside the true law of Christian unity, outside the belief in that spiritual authority which is above kings, that I venture to suggest a single thought to my master. What I mean is, I doubt not, a thousand times better than what I express.

"On this ground I beg your indulgence, while I beg you to believe that I am the sincerest of your admirers and the most loving of Christians.

"GENERAL DONNADIEU."

In the course of June 1849, F. de Ravignan learns that his old friend is attacked by cholera. He hastened to him, and at the door of the sick-room he passed a Protestant minister, who was withdrawing with a promise soon to call again. When the priest was alone with the sick man, he pressed him to keep the oath he had sworn. "Oh, yes!" replied the chivalrous soldier, "I will die in the Apostolic Roman Church." F. de Ravignan received his abjuration, heard his Confession, and gave him Baptism. In the evening the Protestant minister returned, but he found the door shut against him. The General died a Catholic as he had promised, and the priest who had admitted him into the Church continued with him until he had sent him on his way to a better land.

The next year, F. de Ravignan received the following letter from Mgr. Sibour, the Archbishop of Paris: "My dear Father, M. Royer-Collard is threatened with death before long. I am very much interested in his salvation. I have reason to think that a visit from you would be beneficial. Be kind enough then to go and see him."

The invalid, a nephew of the well-known Royer-Collard, who died in 1845, was a distinguished Professor at the School of Medicine. F. de Ravignan went, and the grace of the Lord accompanied him. The first things the Jesuit noticed on entering were pictures of Anthony Arnauld and of the Mère Angélique, but the sequel did not bear out this remarkable prognostic. The dying physician confessed, received Holy Communion, and asked to be clothed with the scapular; when he was to be confirmed, Mgr. Sibour, who was at Saint-Germain-en-Laye wrote to F. de Ravignan, on July 24, 1850: "I will not give up to another the care of administering Confirmation to M. Royer-Collard. Tell him that

next Friday I will come to Paris for the purpose."

At the last moment a singular thought passed across the sick man's mind. "What do you think," he asked, "about the Immaculate Conception? It seems to me that on this point Bossuet and Mgr. de Quélen do not agree." F. de Ravignan hastened to reply; and the dying man was satisfied, and exclaimed, "I believe all that F. de Ravignan believes." He breathed his last in the act of finishing this sentence, which gave confidence that he gained eternal life, and was highly to the honour of the Religious whose teaching was received as an oracle.

When the conversion of Prince Paul of Wirtemberg was publicly announced, the Protestants disputed the fact, and his Excellency Mgr. Garibaldi, the Nuncio at Paris, was desirous of being put in possession of an authentic document which he might use on occasion. He applied accordingly to F. de Ravignan, who sent him the subjoined account:—

"Prince Paul of Wirtemberg, brother of the present king, had been living some thirty years in France. About two years ago, I was introduced to him by his daughter, Mme. de Monttessuy. I visited him from time to time, and made no progress in leading this soul to salvation. Towards the end of 1851 the Prince was attacked by a very long and serious illness, which, however, left him full use of his faculties, and even allowed him to leave home occasionally. His disease brought on deafness to a degree which rendered it very troublesome to converse with him. He was attended by one of the Sisters of Bon Secours; she gained a certain influence over him,—that is, she was able to speak to him of God, and he listened. Mme. de Monttessuy, a great favourite of her

father's, was constant in her filial attendance on him. I called frequently.

"At length through the working of God's grace this strong-willed independent mind submitted. The Prince in the most open manner made up his mind to embrace the Catholic religion. He fulfilled all the conditions, made his Confession; and on Jan. 30, 1852, I received his abjuration in his own room, but was obliged, for the convenience of the Prince, to put off his Communion for a few days.

"Just at that time I was myself attacked by illness, and did not leave my room or bed for nearly three months. Prince Paul sent to our house in the Rue de Sèvres every day, to learn when I should be able to see him. He came himself, and declared his desire to complete his work, to receive Holy Communion and Confirmation. I was scarcely able to speak, and was unable to leave the house. The Prince of his own accord begged the Superior to receive his Confession, to say Mass, and give him Communion. On the Monday in Holy Week he performed every duty with the greatest piety; the Prince made his Confession and received Communion in the little chapel of the Foundlings; and that same day, the Nuncio confirmed him in his own room.

"Eight days afterwards the Prince died. It was found possible to administer Extreme Unction; F. Superior did so. The dying man was not then sensible.

"Prince Paul imposed on me the obligation of absolute secrecy, which he wished to be observed for a time. But he allowed me to communicate the good news to the Nuncio, under the promise of secrecy; and afterwards requested him to inform the Pope of the conversion which had taken place. His intellect had long been convinced, and no

mind could be more opposed than his to the principles of Protestantism.

"Mme. de Monttessuy spoke openly of the abjuration which her father had wished to keep secret for a time. The political world became excited. The King of Wirtemberg refused to allow his brother's body to be brought into the kingdom. But what of that? God, we trust, received his soul into the eternal Kingdom."

F. de Ravignan had in 1839 secured the conversion of the learned Baron Walckenaër, Member of the Institute. He became a devout follower of the Gospel, and we may give one letter to show how he persevered in his fidelity to his religion, and in friendship for the priest who had reconciled him to God. "How thankful I ought to be to you! I have quite made up my mind to go and spend three days in Paris, merely to perform my Easter duties. You bring blessings to others, may you be blessed abundantly. This is my most earnest prayer; it has long been fulfilled. We have been alarmed for the state of your health. If ever sorrow for losing you comes to grieve my failing years, I will not conceal that in the pain I should feel, there would enter a good deal of resentment against you. I have often advised you not to abuse the strength you possess, and far from complying, you abuse it greatly."

Ten years afterwards, the good old man performed an act of Christian affection; his wife was seized with illness; he himself hastened to F. de Ravignan before summoning the physician. "His thoughts are not as hers nor as mine," he said; adding with simple faith, "Pray for her, for you are a Saint." F. de Ravignan soon had to perform for the husband the offices he had performed for the wife, and a holy death, after a short

separation, brought the spouses together again in Heaven.

Mme. de Saisseval, in the retirement of a small country-house at Mantes, concluded, in the course of April 1849, an edifying narrative, some extracts from which I shall give here; and I am glad to devote a page of this book to this second mother of deserted children, whose memory fills the mind with so much respect and gratitude.

“M. du Camper, at the age of seventy-one, was approaching the end of an honourable career. He entered the navy early, had been three times round the world, and in his last voyage he was first lieutenant on board the ship of M. Bougainville. Later he was called to take the command of the School-Ship in the port of Brest, then to be Governor of French Guiana, and finally of the West Indies. On his voyages he had got together decorations, collections, memoirs, but not an atom of religion. And yet he had urgent need of this last; two attacks had already shaken him, and he was now threatened with a third and closing crisis.

“F. de Ravignan introduced himself to him with the excuse of a former acquaintanceship at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, while he was quite young; he was but ill received, and after the interchange of a few words, the sick man put off any further conversation for a fortnight. At the end of the appointed period he returned, and five successive times did the invalid pretend to be asleep when the priest was announced.

“The Father began to feel some fear, without, however, losing the hope which never forsook him. One day, on leaving the house, he met a lady of the old seaman's family in whom he could confide, and he said to her, ‘We must finish our work, for, delaying in this way, we may well let the salvation

of this poor soul be lost to us.' 'But, Father, what are we to do?' 'I will tell you, listen to me; my share shall be to go to-morrow and say Mass at Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. But that is not all; I must have help from everybody. In the first place you must ask Mme. de Saisseval to help us with her prayers, and to procure the prayers of all the foundlings; their innocent prayer has such power with God! Then certainly you must have your own task. Get a medal of the Blessed Virgin, and induce the poor man to accept it; and you must make him wear it, for there will be no good done until the Blessed Virgin is interested in it.' 'But, Father, I shall never dare to do it, for I and my medal are sure to get the worst.' 'Why, is your courage sinking in sight of land? Well, do what you like. For my part, I shall do as I said, and at six o'clock to-morrow morning I shall be at the altar of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in that favoured Church of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires.'

"Next day, at the time appointed, every one was at work, each in his own way. F. de Ravignan offered the Holy Sacrifice in the privileged sanctuary: Mme. de Saisseval offered her prayers in union with a hundred orphans; and the timorous ambassadress came to the sick man's bedside and offered him the medal, which has been so well called miraculous. He immediately accepted it, pressed it to his lips, and, placing it round his neck, said firmly, 'I will never part with it.' The game was won. All this happened on a Saturday.

"F. de Ravignan called again on Sunday, and remained a long time alone with the invalid, who no longer wished to be left to his sleep. After he had left, M. du Camper called the pious lady to him and said: 'This good M. de Ravignan has made me tell him my whole life. I really think that he got some-

thing of a Confession from me.' And in reality F. de Ravignan had got something of a Confession from him, for the work had been brought to an end ; but the gallant officer had had very little experience of Confession, and pictured it to himself as something much longer and more difficult. Not long before, he had expressly declared that he would rather sail round the world again than set about making a Confession. The reality was nothing compared with what it had looked at a distance, and the sinner became a penitent without being even conscious of the process. In fact, scarcely had he opened his mouth to acknowledge his sin, than his heart opened to admit repentance for that sin, and soon faith returned to that heart as to her own home.

"From this time the dying man seemed completely changed ; old as he was he had the docility of a child : he called the priest his best friend, and God the best of Fathers. With much labour he tried to recall the prayers which he had learned at his mother's knee, and had so long forgotten ; to help his stubborn memory he took great pains to write them down, and I have his manuscript now before me ; it shows that even when writing he was by no means sure of the words. Then he armed himself with the dying Christian's weapon ; the Crucifix, which his father had used to help himself to die well, had been placed over the bed ; he took it in his hand, and nothing could have induced him to part with it. Sometimes he raised it over his head like a banner ; sometimes he would place it upright on the bed, and cling to it as to an anchor, and in this position he regained the bold bearing of a sailor.

"After receiving the last Sacraments from one of the priests attached to the Madeleine, he continued by signs, for he had lost his speech, to thank F. de Ravignan, who himself thanked the Blessed Virgin.

The resistance had been obstinate, the victory was complete ; and the Father remarked that in all his ministry he had seldom felt more anxiety at first, or found more comfort in the end."

F. de Ravignan was called to attend a sick man who bore one of the great names of the time of the Empire. He was the son of a Marshal, and had himself risen to the highest rank in the army. His conversion was not merely sincere but striking. General the Duke de Bellune summoned all the strength that remained to him, as, in a firm tone, he solemnly disowned and lamented the offences he had committed against God, he alone commanding himself in the midst of his weeping family. After his death, his son expressed his thankfulness to F. de Ravignan in the following terms : "There are feelings which it is impossible to express in words, and which lose something even when spoken. You will excuse me, if I do not use more words in assuring you of the unchangeable gratitude I promise you in return for the effectual comfort your holy ministrations afforded my poor father on his death-bed. Never will I forget, Father, that, in closing his eyes, I had the guidance of your hand."

It may easily be believed that, as F. de Ravignan had experience of sickness, and, like St Paul, had an ardent desire of death, he well knew the art of giving comfort to the sick, and of filling the dying with courage. Like Bourdaloue of old, his skill in this eminently priestly art gained him great repute. At the first news that there was a life in jeopardy, a soul in distress, in the midst of his toils and his own sufferings, by night no less than by day, he forgot himself, left everything and ran rather than walked,—his visits could not be counted, his compassion was exhaustless, his assiduity unwearied.

He was a true minister of that religion which is never greater than at the last hour, when the world seems most contemptible, because for it all is coming to an end, while religion is but beginning. And at these times he put on an indescribably solemn and affectionate mien, and all deemed his presence a security,—to the family he brought peace in the midst of sorrow, to the sick man hope for the journey he was to take, and the soul more readily entrusted itself to these safe hands to be sent on its way to God.

A wealthy Paris banker, a sceptic, and who had exhausted every pleasure, said that nothing on earth, except eloquence, now roused any feeling within him. "That is why," he went on, "I seek out eloquence wherever I find it, at the bar, in the lecture-room, or from the pulpit; and whoever seems to me to have the deepest convictions, he is the best in my eyes. It makes no difference to me what he says; I do not believe anything I hear, anything at all, whether at the bar or from the pulpit." He was asked what preacher he preferred; he answered, "Oh, F. de Ravignan, beyond all doubt; the poor man is up to the neck in conviction, and what is really affecting is, that I am sure he practises all he preaches."

This saying was told to F. de Ravignan who was much amused at it, and, putting his hands to his head, he said, "And the poor man has only one wish, and that is to plunge his head in." At length the wealthy banker put away his scepticism. On his deathbed he, of his own accord, asked for a confessor; this was his reasoning, "There must be something after this life, to account for such a man as F. de Ravignan believing it so thoroughly."

In former times F. de Ravignan had been acquainted with that pattern of grace and elegance the Duke de Gramont, then Duke de Guiche, and first

equerry to the Duke d'Angouleme. Grace and elegance are delicate flowers, a breath would dim their brightness, a tempest came to destroy them. Disfigured by a terrible disease, so as scarcely to be recognised, he turned from the world to God, Who grants pardon to repentance, gives power to endure pain, and rewards after the trial. Religion is always faithful, and meets us commonly as the world is passing away. Though the hand of the Duke de Gramont was paralysed, he found means, in September 1853, to write the following letter to the saintly comforter of his old age: "I am waiting till God, Who sends me sufferings which my strength cannot long withstand, shall be pleased to call me to Himself: allow me, my old friend, to look to you in the hope of receiving the greatest comfort I could have in this world.

"I will tell you what this is. If in the journeys you take in the cause of our holy religion, God should bring you into Italy, remember that it would be a good work to convert to Catholicity Mme. — a Protestant. She has an honest heart. My eldest son, the French minister at Turin, will assist you.

"I am near my end, and death is seizing me tyrannically, and I beg you to help me with your prayers that my sunken courage may rise, with entire confidence in God, on my own behalf and that of my wife and children. For this purpose I ask your holy benediction.—The old friend of your youth,
"DUC DE GRAMONT."

F. de Ravignan replied:—"Yesterday your daughter sent me the affecting letter you were good enough to write me. It moved me even to tears. Your prayers and your great sufferings will draw down blessings from on high upon her whom you so earnestly desire to see enter the bosom of the Church. If ever it is in my power to contribute

to this result, be assured that I shall seize the opportunity with joy. The comfort I should feel in bringing back a soul to the unity of religion would be doubled by my gladness at accomplishing your pious desire."

The journey into Italy did not take place; the Duke continued to the last his prayers for the person who so far had not entered the Catholic Church, but he took with him to heaven at least the hope of her conversion. F. de Ravignan was not able to attend his noble friend when the long-expected death at length came suddenly. I read in one of his letters: "The Duke de Gramont has passed away in one of those attacks to which he was subject. They sent for me, but he was dead when I came. His life was very good. I had heard his Confession, and he received Holy Communion eight days before. His sufferings were terrible; they have reached their end."

Such is the end of the history of every man; the soul remains alone face to face with God alone. Happy is he who has foreseen this the inevitable close of our course here below.

F. de Ravignan was often summoned when any person of rank was to be addressed and reconciled to God. His visits were at first received as an honour, and he commonly finished by working a conversion.

But it ought to be known that F. de Ravignan's ministry was not confined only to the rich and the great ones of this world. We shall see afterwards that though he is to preach at the Tuileries, the last sounds of his voice will be devoted to the aged persons under the care of the Little Sisters of the Poor. His zeal had no respect for rank; his compassion became the more lively, the deeper the pit, or the greater the danger.

One day an actress came out of curiosity to hear a charity sermon which F. de Ravignan was to preach at a church in Paris. She remarked on leaving the door that the preacher spoke very well; but she did not amend her life. She had, however, been touched; and the influence of sickness helping the work, she found herself a convert to religion. She was soon attacked by cancer, and then where could she look for comfort and hope but in the religion of the Cross and of Heaven? She sent for the preacher, who had that day spoken so well to her soul. F. de Ravignan made haste to the house, in the neighbourhood of the Palais Royal. The poor woman was then forty-five; she had been on the stage since the age of four, had never been baptized, and was living with an officer of rank, by whom she had two children. Thus she was very far from God; she did not even know the name of Jesus Christ; but even now her soul inclined towards the truths of faith. Little time was needed to instruct and prepare her.

F. de Ravignan first baptized her, and then performed the ceremony of her marriage. When all was over, the two children were brought in to see their mother, fresh from the laver of regeneration. In pain and sorrow, yet cheerful withal, she called them to her, embraced them, asked their pardon for the bad example her life had given them, and informed them that she had become a Christian, adding that there is no peace nor happiness on earth except in religion, and, above all, at the hour of death. The poor woman sitting on a couch spoke with a calm and collected manner, and for five minutes her voice alone was heard above the sobs of the rest. The tears of the priest mingled with those of the family. The following day the Curé of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois came to complete the previous ceremony by bringing to

this house, now the abode of the peace of God, that holy Viaticum which was the dying woman's first Communion.

Another person of the same profession whom F. de Ravignan met with was nothing short of a prodigy, a young actress whose life was a miracle of grace. She was compelled under obedience to write the account of her own life: we will give an abridgment of it. It will be perceived from the perusal that so honest and generous a heart was formed for the love of Jesus Christ:—

“I shall never, my dear Father, be able to do what you wish unless God help me. My mother's married life had been very unhappy, and when she was about forty her husband deserted her, after spending all her property. She found herself left alone in Paris without money, friends, or employment; to add to her misery, she was near her confinement, and before long I came into the world to increase her trouble.

“My poor mother had not that strong sense of religion which is a support under all the trials God sends us, but she had a very lively faith in our Blessed Lady. While I was yet very young, she taught me to say a little prayer which I have never seen in any book: ‘My God, I give Thee my body, my soul, my heart, and my life; I give myself wholly to Thee. Give me the grace to die rather than offend Thee mortally. Amen.’

“When about five years old I often accompanied an aged friend of my mother's to Mass, and particularly to adore Christ in the Sepulchre. I returned home perfectly ill with having seen our Lord dead for our salvation, and I wept; my mother was angry that my feelings had been so much excited, and absolutely forbade my going to the church again. I was very determined that I would have the name of Mary. I was called

Josephine in the house; but when any one asked me my name, I always answered, unhesitatingly, Mary, the name of the Blessed Virgin.

“When I was six years old my mother sent me to the theatre to learn to dance. She was requested to allow me to perform, and she said I might try; I had a part given me, and succeeded very well. Meantime I heard some girls speak of their first Communion, but my mother never spoke of it; I was determined to make it, and as no priest would admit me because I was at the theatre, I said to my mother, ‘In the Roman Church they will have nothing to do with me; well, I will leave them and go to the French Church.’ I went to M. Châtel, and told him my position, and he received me very kindly. I was delighted. ‘So I am going to make my first Communion,’ I thought. To tell the truth, I had no idea what this meant, but it was all the same, I was happy in the thought.

“M. Châtel baptized a child in my presence, and used the words: ‘I baptize thee in the name of God, and of Christ the Legislator.’ On returning to the sacristy I asked him, ‘What is a Legislator?’ He explained it to me. ‘But do you not believe that Jesus is God?’ I asked. ‘I had the bad luck to go to school,’ he answered, ‘and there I learned that one and one make two, and one again makes three.’ ‘But about Mary—do you not believe she is a virgin?’ ‘No.’ That was quite enough; I went to my mother and said, with my heart full, ‘God will not have anything to do with me. I will not take Communion from the hand of a man who makes Jesus a Legislator and Mary a common woman.’

“I was constant in saying my prayers. I was incessantly at work; when not at the theatre, I did little pieces of needle-work and sold them. Vice surrounded me on every side, even on the part of

the women I loved most. I was sorry for them. My mother had instilled into me principles which the most terrible misery has not been able to destroy. I was ill clad, and had nothing but potatoes to eat, but I was happy with my mother. I thought to myself, 'God sees me, He finds something to like in me in my old bonnet; He does not sneer at poor Mary.' For some people did sneer at me, and said, 'If you liked, you might have rich clothes.' 'Yes,' I would reply, 'but I should kill my mother with sorrow.' I was one of the principal performers at the theatre, and consequently much admired. I say this, that you may the better understand what protection my heavenly Patroness gave me in this abyss of sin.

"My mother fell ill, and I was obliged to sit up all night, for I had no servant; with performances and rehearsals in the day, I had no time to learn my parts except at night, sitting by my poor mother's bedside. And here God was good and kind to me. I had a very small salary in spite of my position. Notwithstanding this, for the four months and a half that my mother was in bed, though I spent a great deal of money, more than I had, yet I incurred no debts, and myself got through in safety. I might well have fallen ill with sorrow and fatigue; the reason of my escape was that I prayed, and God helps those that pray heartily.

"The last night I passed with my mother I did not see that she was close to her death. At last she spoke her last words: 'Mary, I love you,' and she breathed her last. Oh, Father, what a night that was! I had never been separated from my mother all my life, and here I was alone, without parents, friends, fortune, or God, for I had not yet made Him my own. I swore to my mother, in the presence of that body the soul had left, lifting that hand which

had blessed me, that I would always live as became her daughter. They wanted to take me from my mother. 'I will quit her,' I said, 'at the grave.' I was able to bear their burying her. At last they took her from me, but not for ever. I shall see her again one day, shall I not, Father? I went every day to the cemetery at Montmartre; and when I came back, I would throw myself on my knees in the middle of my room. I had a portrait of my mother, towards which I turned; I had a Crucifix which had been placed on her body; I kissed the Crucifix, I kissed the portrait, and between these two objects I passed my life. Perhaps, Father, you will be unable to understand so great a love for a creature, for your whole life is devoted to God, but I had been in the habit of looking on my mother as something supernatural.

"My companions brought me 155 francs; my poverty was well known, I made no concealment, I could not feel ashamed of it.

"I had had several offers of marriage. I never consulted my own heart, but God and my mother, the Crucifix and the portrait. I was sure that when I did marry I should please God and Mary, and also my mother.

"At length I happened to hear you preach, Father; you cleared up the confusion of thoughts in my head. I am still very ignorant of religion. I love Jesus and Mary with a real love. Why, or how, I do not know: I loved them, and that is all I can say.

"It was only then I understood my position. 'Holy Virgin,' I now said, 'the theatre without you, or you without the theatre.' My choice was made. 'But how am I to come to you, Mary, what must I do?' On Low Sunday I had a nearer sight of you; I had a place just under the pulpit. 'I will write to F. de Ravignan,' I thought:

‘he is sure to be able to get me this favour from the Archbishop: I must have Holy Communion.’ I wrote to you, Father, and you know the rest; but what you do not know is, that my mind and heart are no longer the same; the pious ladies you have introduced me to have changed my whole being.

“Thank you, Reverend Father, thank you; your zeal did it all. I have had Holy Communion, and you know I must be the happiest of women; and I had near me Mme. de Gontaut, Mme. Levasseur, and Mme. d’Auberville. I once used to think that I loved God; but no, it was He loved me. I loved Mary, but not with the holy love she has for us. I do not know what God has in store for me; but if He will but make me happy, He may send me all the misfortunes He pleases: I will try to bear them all with heart devoted to Him. If God preserves in me the faith He has given, there will be nothing I shall not be able to do. It is only now I have come to understand martyrdom.

“I beg you, Father, to excuse the length of my story, but I am not much used to writing. It is out of obedience to you that I relate the particulars. When I began to speak of my mother, I could not stop.

“The first thing I did on leaving the theatre was to receive Holy Communion. God was pleased that when I left that life I should kneel at His holy Table. My whole life, Father, shall be devoted to God, to Jesus and Mary, and to the ladies and you.

“MARIA.”

Thus we see that God has some of His Elect in every place, and that a right will calls down grace and blessing. In the theatre, the young actress had been an angel in purity and innocence, and in affection for her mother. She was faithful, and how could God be wanting in fidelity?

F. de Ravignan always had resources and expedients at hand; and removed alike from prodigality and niggardliness, with a vigour equalled only by his prudence, to help a soul he would have moved the world. In the first instance he placed the young woman under the care of some pious and devout persons, whom he knew to be always ready to answer to the appeals of his apostolic zeal; then he used his influence with the Archbishop to obtain leave to give her Communion, at any rate in a private chapel, notwithstanding the opinion then widely prevalent in France that all performers on the stage were excommunicate. He did not himself hold this opinion. The wished-for permission was given. However, he soon bade the actress give up her connexion with the theatre altogether, and trust henceforth to Providence for a livelihood. For some time he provided for all her wants like a father, with no less delicacy than liberality.

After six years of trials she became the mother of a family, and wrote to thank F. de Ravignan for the assistance which, as she said, she no longer needed. And she went on—

“Oh what happiness I have had during these six years! and yet what misery, what sickness! But God was at the bottom of my heart. What happiness that I knew not before! I owe it all to you!

“How sorry I am for those who never think of God! In the love He imparts to us, we find all that we need here below. This life of the soul has joys which are so utterly unknown in the world.

“Help me, Reverend Father, by your prayers, that my soul may remain ever firmly united to the merciful God Who has condescended to help one so lowly as me. How much my past life has shown me of God’s love for His creatures! I too would wish to have but one word in my heart—

love for Jesus in joy, in sadness, and in wealth—love for Jesus! I let you into these secrets of my heart, that you may know all the good that your charity has done for me.

“I am happy, Father, and happy in soul—happy with the happiness which the world cannot give nor take away! I am happy, because I trust myself entirely to Jesus.”

A martyrdom of pain soon carried off this woman of truly seraphic soul, leading her to love to contemplate Jesus on the Cross, and to dwell on the hope of soon reaching heaven. We find in her will a clause, by which she bequeathed to her children the duty of gratitude:—

“My wish is that you cherish great reverence for F. de Ravignan. To his charity it is owing that I die in the bosom of the Church. Do not forget him in your prayers.”

This list of remarkable conversions, at the head of which stand the Count de Molé and the Viscount de Chateaubriand, might easily be extended; but we must not speak of those that are still living. Let us leave them to pay in private the debt of gratitude they owe to the apostolic man who opened to them the ways of salvation.





CHAPTER XVII.

CONGREGATION OF THE CHILDREN OF MARY.

Origin of the Association—Meetings at the House of Mme. de Swetchine—Direction of the Children of Mary entrusted to F. de Ravignan by the Bishop of Orleans—Retreats in the Rue de Varennes—Marshal de Saint-Arnaud and M. de Salvandy attend secretly—Death of Mme. Sothène de Larochevoucauld.



THE congregation of ladies which now exists in the chapel of the Sacred Heart in the Rue de Varennes owes to F. de Ravignan not only its present prosperity, but its first establishment. I will give the details of its origin, which I take from the registers of the Children of Mary.

Shortly after the birth of the daughter of H.R.H. the Duke de Berry, who is now Duchess Regent of Parma, the Sisters of the Holy Cross of St Andrew were invited to Paris, and placed under the protection of the young princess. They are the same community as still exists in the Rue de Sèvres beyond the Boulevard des Invalides, devoted to the care of the poor children of the neighbourhood. But the foundation was not completed when its chief hopes were overthrown by the Revolution of July. The Marquise de Saluces, who had acted as president of the undertaking, conceived the idea of inviting all the persons who had taken interest

in this now abandoned house to meet in her drawing-room, and she asked F. de Ravignan to come to make an appeal to their charity. St Vincent of Paul could not have roused their compassion more effectually. The impression produced was so lively, that it was determined at once to put into writing the expressions which gave rise to it, and send a copy of the discourse to the princess in her exile. The Countess de Bonneuil was entrusted with the work of doing this, and she laid what she had written before F. de Ravignan. He answered: "I have the honour to return you your manuscript; I do not think that I spoke so well. You may," he went on, "with the help of Mme. de Saluces and Mme. de Chastellux, but without saying a word of it to any one else, draw up a short provisional list of pious young ladies in the world for our projected meetings at Mme. de Swetchine's. Be so good as to send it to me, with your own three names at the head."

On looking through this list of forty names, we are glad to see that the noblest families of France preserve their old tradition of charity.

The first meeting took place on May 1, 1846, at the house of Mme. de Swetchine, in the Rue Saint Dominique, in her private chapel, so well known for its rich ornaments of gold and precious stones. This meeting was the first beginning of the Congregation, and the earliest Rules were drawn up that very day; and F. de Ravignan sanctioned the pious project, giving it the following title in his own handwriting: "Regulations drawn up and adopted by some Christian women." A glance is enough to show how full these rules are of prudence and piety.

"We propose to ourselves the following Christian objects of our union in heart and in prayer:—

"On the first Friday in every month we will

unite in heart in making reparation for the outrages which our Lord is constantly suffering in the Blessed Sacrament. We will ask, on behalf of one another, for advance in interior life and recollection, and that love of suffering on which it is to be built.

“On Saturday, the day set apart for devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we will ask, on behalf of one another, the grace of gaining some hearts to Jesus Christ.

“We will choose one day in each month to make the preparation for death. We will ask, on behalf of one another, the grace of a happy death, with a joyful trust in God’s mercy, and in the assistance of the Blessed Virgin and of all the Saints, who will come to assist us at that hour like powerful and faithful friends.

“Our next Communion shall be offered for our own deceased relatives, and those of our Sisters in the Congregation.

“The next Communion shall be offered for our own children, and for those of our Sisters in the Congregation, and to obtain the grace that we may rightly perform our duties to them and to our families.

“Another day shall be set apart for the Holy Catholic Church, its missionaries and its priests. When the need they have for grace is considered, the duty of the faithful to aid their glorious ministry becomes plain.

“Another day for our own living relatives, and for those of our Sisters in the Congregation, and for the persons who may be recommended to our prayers.

“Another day for neglected parishes in the country, where there is so much spiritual destitution, so much help to be sought for these poor souls. We will ask, on behalf of one another, the

grace of giving edification to these parishes, and of doing something for their good.

“We propose also the following easy and beneficial objects of our union in external work :

“What ought to give us the greatest assurance of being united for ever in God’s presence is the care to unite ourselves closely with the intentions of the Church, by adopting its appointed prayers, celebrating its feasts, and venerating the Saints whom it honours. Love for God is a tie which binds together all the elect in heaven and on earth.

“A special bond of union among us will be the habitual use of holy meditation. We will devote half an hour each morning to this practice.

“We will each choose some one particular point on which to make an examination of ourselves once at least in the day, for example, in the evening. By thus giving ourselves up to recollection and the interior life, we shall gain the principal wish of our heart, self-conquest and mortification.

“It will be our duty to take care to prevent our piety being irksome to others or repulsive, and we will unhesitatingly renounce every kind of interior consolation to escape giving the smallest annoyance to any member of our family.”

I have thought it right to extract these passages from a rule intended for ladies of high position. Some concession may perhaps have been expected in favour of persons of delicacy, or some paring down of piety by the director. I was anxious to show the contrary. High birth was no excuse for withdrawing from the struggle against nature : and F. de Ravignan knew one way only to salvation : To follow Jesus in the way of the Cross.

Such was the undertaking at its outset. Soon Mme. de Swetchine, whose virtues and literary powers had already gained her much distinction, could not find words in which to tell F. de Ravignan

what happiness and profit she and her pious friends found in their monthly meetings.

Thus she once wrote to him : " My dear and venerated Father, I am already looking forward to the happy hour we shall spend on Friday." Another time she said : " Friday, dear father ; Friday the happy day for us all, for which I am already grateful even before the time." Again : " How good you are ! My heart accepts as a grace whatever comes to me from God, and the encouragement you give me is not the least of the favours for which I daily give Him my thanks."

When, in 1847, sickness kept F. de Ravignan at Toulouse, the pious Countess wrote : " This winter has been nothing but a series of trials : in addition to the sorrows common to everybody, each one has had his own private sorrow. We have had numerous losses, and there are gaps everywhere. As to what remains, there is still room for anxiety. Mme. de Gontaut, in particular, has often alarmed me by repeated relapses, and continues to give me uneasiness. In fact, for some time back I have not been satisfied, and I scarcely like to say that I begin to be alarmed. . . . Do not make too much account of my fears, which I should chide myself for having mentioned, if informing you, who are so careful of us, were not the best way to elicit the marks of your care, so full of power over the soul, by which alone the feeble body can be sustained.

" I sometimes think that this care might go even a little farther ; and hasten the blessed moment when you will return. When all possible danger of frost is quite over, it seems to me that Toulouse will lose its right to be preferred to us. I do not even allow it the right to leave you at rest, for you there must have round you many friends, the only sort of people you have any reason to fear in this world.

“Thank God, my anxiety on your account has scarcely ever surpassed my sorrow at our separation. In the worst times I have always felt that you needed nothing but rest, rest absolute to begin with, and then gradually broken in upon by employment, that other no less imperious desire of a soul, the devotedness of which would turn to the prejudice of your health if it were left too long to feed upon itself. The same gradations must necessarily be observed in your use of speech; and my desire that you may be preserved to the world is too far above all other wishes, for me to have any doubt of my own disinterestedness, when I express the hope of seeing you re-open the course of instructions in my chapel; and if you had the same opportunities as I of judging how much their loss is felt, you would be thoroughly convinced of their utility. You would be deeply touched if you saw in how many ways, by how many of the *faithful*, this inconsolable regret for your absence is expressed, what uneasiness they have felt, and how certainly whenever we meet your name is one of the first to be mentioned; people came from far and near to put questions to me, believing me more fortunate than I was in reality. Yet it is not altogether a mistake; for if I did not receive any news direct from yourself, I was favourably situated for drawing news from the original sources; and then if, on a point of general interest, any one collects the ideas of all sorts of people without losing sight of any, enough can be got together to supply means of giving information to others.

“Our delightful meetings are, I suppose, well adapted, and were from the first intended, to occupy a middle place between private conversation and public addresses, something to do the good, while it diminished the danger and fatigue. The interruption of the Conferences at Notre-Dame is

a sorrow which, as I dread, will have its measure filled by the loss of the *Retreat* in those hearts where it is not full already. But when this great sorrow has passed, I have no doubt that the interruption will help you in accomplishing your holy mission with still more fruit and reputation. The time for the break has always appeared to me chosen by Providence. Earlier, many results which are now secured for ever would have been missed ; later, too much would have been taken from the years of full, unimpaired activity. The sacrifice falls wholly on a short interval intended to enhance the sense of the blessings hitherto received, the pledges of those which you shall have hereafter.

"I cannot tell you how warmly F. Lacordaire begged me to thank you for your kind remarks, of which I showed him the very words, nor how deeply he was affected. Like him I was deeply affected, my dear Father, for all that comes from you is imbued with the sanctity which destroys the poison which all praise contains in a greater or less degree."

After the pious association had existed in the Rue Saint-Dominique for three or four years, it was removed to the Rue de Varennes, and amalgamated with another, the name of which it adopted. This step was very beneficial to both. The Congregation of the Children of Mary, erected in the Convent of the Sacred Heart for the benefit of former pupils who had the right of admission, and of other ladies in the world to whom it was granted as a privilege, was languishing, and seemed to be in some danger. It had too many directors at first, and it ended with having none. The Abbé Dupanloup was taking in hand the restoration of the decaying society when he was called away to the Bishopric of Orleans. In F. de Ravignan he found

another self, and he gave him to the Children of Mary. When the Jesuit accepted the new work the old was not abandoned; he soon united the two, and gave them unity of interest.

The meetings in the Rue Saint-Dominique felt the want of space and of numbers; the Congregation in the Rue de Varennes that of life and activity; by the fusion of the two both would gain in completeness. Besides the reinforcement of his chosen band of noble women, F. de Ravignan gave the Children of Mary the credit of his name, the fire of his zeal, and the energy of his character. Thanks to his prudent direction and powerful addresses, life was soon thrown into the meetings: the mere fact that he was there brought a crowd to the door; and the staidness of religion, and a vigour tempered by prudence, were absolutely necessary, to guard the Children of Mary against the novel danger of becoming over popular. A little more, and the meetings would have been frequented merely in compliance with fashion. It is the way of the world; people are carried along as the gale blows; the set was towards the Rue de Varennes, and the tide would, we may be sure, have run very high but for the hand by which it was arrested.

We shall find that from this time to his death F. de Ravignan continued his work in connection with the Congregation of the Children of Mary. Every month he gave two exhortations, one at Mass, the other in the evening before Benediction. Each year brought a Retreat to be given. He preached six Retreats; and, on turning over his papers, I find that he prepared two others which were not given; one in 1852, on account of his sickness, and the other in 1858, on account of his death.

His zeal led him to admit strangers to these Retreats at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, which from the Congregation which formed their centre

were always called Retreats of the Children of Mary. There were many applications, and from the beginning of the year up to Lent, cards of admission were sought for with eagerness ; but, at the same time, some came by invitation, and ladies of most worldly lives found themselves side by side with ladies of the greatest piety ; there were even Protestants mixed with the Catholics. The chapel, the tribunes, and even the choir, up to the very steps of the altar, were filled, and the assembly consisted of some six hundred ladies belonging to the most distinguished circles of Paris society.

A work of this magnitude not only made some noise, even among the countless subjects of conversation in Paris, but it could not fail to have a real and salutary influence. How many souls have found peace by finding grace in this sanctuary, and while listening to his impressive and persuasive words ! We may well acknowledge that the frivolous sometimes made remarks, in their usual style, on the weighty expressions which zeal inspires, and which the depths of conscience approved ; but what follows from partial drawbacks ? We know well enough that the world will never cease to be the world, and an abuse is like an error ; the one presupposes some good to corrupt, the other some truth to pervert.

The character of the Religious in these Retreats for ladies was just the same as we saw in his Retreats for men ; he constantly followed the Book of the Exercises of St Ignatius, repeating continually the same thing, but never repeating the same expressions, and gaining the right to seem more simple than others, because it was his gift to be more dignified. His language breathed the profoundest faith and the most ardent charity, and was powerful and contagious in exciting passion, most

commonly giving encouragement, sometimes inspiring terror.

Hearers of distinction, soldiers or literary men, often came to gather up the words which were supposed to be spoken to women alone. Marshal de Saint-Arnaud, Minister of War, was brought into the sacristy, and listened behind the half-open door. One of the Forty of the French Academy, whose name will not easily be guessed, wrote to F. de Ravignan: "I have a great wish, and more, a great need, to hear the words of one who is convinced and gives conviction. If you can let me know the day on which you preach at the Sacred Heart, and, at the same time, give me the means of getting into the chapel, I shall be very grateful."

F. de Ravignan noticed another Academician, whom he had met before under very different circumstances, and who was remarkably constant in his attendance, taking his place far back in the little side-chapel. But M. Salvandy was no longer in the Ministry. On one occasion he did not hesitate, at a full meeting of the Academy, to make an allusion to a sermon of F. de Ravignan's. He addressed him in the following terms:—

"REVEREND FATHER,—I have only just got some copies of a discourse pronounced some days ago, and which I make a point of sending to you. Its only claim to this honour lies in a passage in which some words of yours are reproduced. I should wish you to know that when, by your leave, I heard them, the soil on which they fell was not absolutely barren and ungrateful. I hope that this knowledge will lead you to afford me the means of hearing you more frequently. I can say to you, with the sincerity in which none would think of failing when he is dealing with you, that there are no words which have the power of yours in piercing

the bottom of the soul. You stir *nature* to its lowest depths, and introduce that auspicious trouble which should be the road to peace. For the sake of the public, and in particular for my own sake, I very much regret that God in giving to your voice its old persuasiveness, has not restored its original vigour."

I owe it to the memory of M. de Salvandy to quote another letter of his, which is no less honourable to him than flattering to F. de Ravignan. At the solemn sitting held by the Academy for the reception of Mgr. Dupanloup the Bishop of Orleans into its numbers, M. de Salvandy replied to the venerated prelate's address, in a discourse which amounted to a profession of faith. F. de Ravignan, who was sitting in the front row of the semicircle opposite the tribune, frequently gave signs of the most cordial approbation. The orator did not fail to watch him, and gladly remarked this applause, which he valued above all that he received, and full of the impression produced, he wrote :—

" REVEREND FATHER,—I find it difficult to express my gratitude for the approval which I so much value. I learned from Mme. de Salvandy the kind expressions you had used ; she feels your kindness deeply. During the actual course of the sitting I had the greatest pleasure in noticing your approbation, and it supplied me with strength to struggle, however ill, against some accidental difficulties which frustrated all my preparations. I much regretted these unfortunate occurrences at a time when I felt myself face to face with a great duty, to fulfil which well was my great desire.

" I saw clearly that there was the opportunity of delivering two discourses ; the one would be

easy, and agreeable to ordinary views, which would regard the Bishop merely as a man of talent, a friend of letters, the inspired bard of their lofty mission; the other discourse is that which I attempted. I thought it my duty to attempt it, taking on myself all the risk and danger; I felt that standing there in presence of the first Bishop who has been elected for so long a period, greater interests demanded to be consulted than success on a single day.

“ You must give me the credit of having thoroughly taken up this position, and thrown myself into my task. Of all those present you knew the best, what you have so frequently expressed in the most admirable terms, the authority of conscience before everything, and the little merit which attends obedience to its voice. As long as the argument lies only between us and the rest of men, it is difficult to maintain the opposite. Without claiming any merit to myself, I may safely say that, when the question has been proposed in this form, I have never failed in obedience. But when the question arises between ourselves and our own passions, it is then that the difficulty is great, and falls frequent. But the more frequently we have fallen, the more fully do we see the value of the power which alone can make us always victorious. Thus it happens that I am able no more to comprehend the contempt which is now in fashion than I understand the spirit of insult which once prevailed; and I was really glad to protest in the name of the leading association of the literary world, one of the most important bodies in the state, against that ignoring of the existence of religion in our mighty empire which is the spirit of the Revolution of 1830. I branded this fatal spirit at its birth. To treat it in its own turn as conquered and condemned seemed to me a good action, and in doing

it I have achieved a success which is rendered more valuable and more surely real by your congratulations.

“I hope, Reverend Father, that you will continue to entertain the feelings which I value so highly. In them I recognise the true crown of my public life, my *Nunc dimittis*, and I ask only occasional remembrance in your prayers in return for my own feelings of most sincere, affectionate, and heartfelt devotion.”

But we will return to the Children of Mary, and that a juster value may be set on their Congregation, we will show how these ladies of high rank were in its meetings taught to face their death.

The instance of a certain young lady in Paris was often mentioned as one of those rare cases in which all is found that makes up felicity in this world : an illustrious name and great wealth, remarkable beauty, and more than ordinary talents ; and, finally, perfect happiness in her home. With an affectionate husband, and already blessed with three children, she united to all these gifts of fortune and natural endowments the most precious graces of Heaven ; she was the glory of the Children of Mary. Yolande de Polignac, daughter of the well-known minister to Charles X., was born in 1830, while her noble and unfortunate father was lying in a State Prison and threatened with a public execution. She grew up amid the sorrows which accompany exile, and drank in faith from her family traditions, and vigour of mind from adversity. On returning to France, she became by marriage Countess Sosthène de la Rochefoucauld, Duchess of Bisaccia, and through this alliance was granddaughter of Duke Matthew de Montmorency, whose pious life was closed by so holy a death.

One thing only was wanting to this array of whatever constitutes earthly happiness,—that assurance against death of which no promise is ever given. Death swooped down upon the young family ; all were struck, and such as did resist the stroke, were not the ones who least deserve to be lamented.

In the depth of winter, when the streets were covered with frost, in the early morning of nine successive days, a carriage, bearing the arms of one of our noblest families, drew up before the door of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. A slight and delicate young woman alighted, going to pray and weep before her who has the name of Comforter of the Afflicted. She was begging the life of her husband, of whose recovery the physicians despaired. On the last day of the novena, the dying man was almost miraculously restored, and joy was again felt by his family.

This alarm was no more than the beginning of sorrows ; death soon began to deal surer strokes. A terrible and contagious disorder suddenly broke out, all the children were attacked by it at once, and one was shortly carried off. The poor mother wrote the following truly heroic letter to the Duchess de Montmorency, from beside the cradle where her son had just expired.¹ Her own sorrow was under so much command that she had consideration for the sorrow of others, and she was cautious how she broke the mournful intelligence.

“ MY VERY DEAR MAMMA,—I am very anxious about my little Leopold ; he is getting worse, and I am afraid it is the croup, for he has difficulty in breathing, and his voice is much affected. Let us put ourselves into God’s hands ; whatever He does is for the best. If the dear child would not here-

after help to promote God's glory, we must have courage to pray that he may be taken from us while he is pure and uncorrupt.

"The physicians have just come from seeing him. My dear Mamma, I was right ; it is a bad case of croup, and there is no hope.

"Nine o'clock in the evening.—My dear Mamma, my child is in heaven ; he died without pain. I have just been kissing him, and asking him to pray for you who loved him so much, and for us all. I have persuaded Sosthène not to go into the room, for it is very contagious. He feels it very much, but he is quite well. Do not be uneasy ; God will not allow him to fall ill, and I will take great care of him. To myself the blow is very great, but there is no bitterness in my sorrow. The thought of his infinite bliss is almost the only one before my mind, and when I think that he is happy, I cannot feel altogether unhappy. I am sensible of God's help to me, and I bless Him again and again for having chosen me to endure suffering, and my child to enjoy glory and happiness. Till we meet, dear Mamma, let us frequently say, 'Dear little Angel, pray for us.'"

We may believe that the Angel did pray, and the mother soon went to rejoin her child. While careful to prevent her husband coming near the corpse, she did not herself observe the precaution ; she pressed her lips on her son's forehead to take a parting kiss, and in so doing she breathed in the contagion. The disease struck her instantly ; she retired to bed, and felt that her death was at hand. Another novena was then begun at the church of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires ; the husband was now begging on behalf of his wife what her prayers for him had been successful in obtaining. But this time more powerful prayer was made in heaven

than on earth, and on the ninth day the happy mother was with her *little Angel*.

At a meeting of the Children of Mary on the Feast of St Joseph, a short time after, F. de Ravignan related the circumstances of this happy death, which he had witnessed. He was deeply moved, and, as he himself said, tears rather than words would have suited his subject. We will introduce the following lines, to save from perishing the memory of a granddaughter of Matthew de Montmorency:—

“When we see the close come of a life which had seemed to present to us the living embodiment of blessedness, it may be thought that God means to give us an important lesson. He had denied this young woman nothing of all that is desirable on earth—beauty, wealth, lively affections; and, at God’s touch, in a single moment all disappeared. This life, we may well conclude, is nothing, and we are journeying elsewhere. Our comfort is in our knowledge of the living faith which leads to heaven.

“In this young heart, which I knew well, there dwelt a sincere faith. When herself seized by the malady which had carried off her child, she asked to see me, and said, ‘Talk to me a great deal on the happiness of heaven.’ She said to me, too, ‘I know that I am going to die;’ and she herself asked for the last Sacraments. She received them with peace and confidence. She sent for me several times, and resolved to make a general Confession of her whole life. On finishing, she suggested to me what to do: ‘You will give me the plenary Indulgence,’ she said; ‘pray much for me, and tell my husband to get me many prayers.’

“Children of Mary, let me tell you that this child felt towards Mary a tender affection, a boundless confidence. From the day of her first Communion, which she made in this hallowed

house where we now are, she never on one single Saturday failed to recite the office of the Immaculate Conception ; and during her five hours' death-struggle, as often as the name of Mary came to my lips, though she was in the arms of death, she nevertheless repeated again and again, in a touching tone, 'Mary, Mary, Mary !'

"The day before her death, she sent me a paper with the words, 'I shall die soon,' written in pencil by her own hand. On the last day she again asked for the Holy Viaticum ; and, as you know, this was the very last day of the novena you were making for her. The grace she thus received was the last fruit of your prayers and the presage of glory.

"When we found that we must resign ourselves to see her pass from among us, she alone remained calm. She was full of affection and compassion for her relatives ; full of smiles and beaming with joy when she thought of her own good fortune. I asked her if there was anything which gave her uneasiness, and she answered, 'Nothing, Father.' When the time came for the last farewells, she spoke to each one separately,—to her mother, to her brothers. Then fixing her eyes on her husband, 'Sosthène,' she said, 'I love you with all my heart.' 'Yes, Yolande,' replied he ; 'but God above all.' On her being reminded in this noble manner of her first love, a thrill passed through her ; she sat up in her bed and finished her life with this act of perfect charity : 'Yes, yes, Sosthène, God above all.'

"Thus we see that God alone abides ; and on the road to God, the Blessed Virgin must be our support."



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DIRECTION OF SOULS.

F. de Ravignan's Views of the Spiritual Life: they are lofty, practical, and solid—His Zeal that Souls should make Advancement—Character of his Direction—A religious Vocation sanctioned by Heaven.



MIDST all the business and troubles of life, in the streets no less than in his room, one thing never quitted the mind of F. de Ravignan: all his thoughts were borne towards the realities we do not see. He was weary of life, disgusted with the earth, and shrank from contact with the world. He found no rest but in God, and, as we may say, could draw breath only from heaven itself.

"Let us leave the earth," he often exclaimed; "*Sursum corda*, let us lift up our hearts. Thus raised up, we shall breathe the air of our true country. How good it is to pass to the region of peace and oblivion! Let us plunge into the Divinity."

There were days from time to time when this holy grief for his exile mastered him, and was seen in his countenance. On such occasions it was often remarked, "The good Father has an attack of his home sickness." To soothe the pain

of waiting for his deliverance, he was fond of feeding his hope by looking not to earth but to heaven. At length the upward glance habitual to his eye gave it a heavenly expression of contemplation. When he was unable to look at his own home, he loved at least to see the Tabernacle, the *House of God* and *Gate of Heaven*. As he had to remain long sitting in the chapel of the Sacred Heart, a new confessional was prepared for him, more convenient, as was said, than the old, and in a better position. He declined to make any change, saying, "In my usual place I am in sight of the little gilded door of the Tabernacle; I find in it rest and comfort."

Some notes have been furnished me by persons who were long under his direction. I read in one: "Those who were able to penetrate to his soul, entered, as it were, some boundless space, some calm and lofty region; they were lost, or more truly found again in God. It was rather by what he was, than by what he said, that he drew souls to all that is most perfect and most elevated. But the power to understand what he was, belonged only to those already far advanced in perfection."

With heart thus full of the love of God and of heaven, he would willingly have dealt with souls alone. To direct souls was with him to continue his prayer. Whether he was speaking to God or of God, he loved God, and led others to love. He studied men in his own heart, God he studied in the souls of others; for God resides in the soul, and the impress of His finger on the spirit declares His action more clearly than traces of His footsteps seen in nature.

In another of these notes on his spiritual tendencies, I find: "I have remarked that F. de Ravignan always took a favourable view of the consciences which were laid bare before him; he conjured up

in thought beings far more perfect than those with whom he had to do. The spiritual son always saw that he was cherished in the heart of his father, under the form of some imaginary perfection. This circumstance was a powerful charm to attract souls. Each one loved in himself this being to which the good, kind heart of a blessed and honoured father had given existence, and each one strove to give perfect reality to that existence."

But lofty as was the spirituality of F. de Ravignan, it was not less practical and solid. He felt an instinctive horror of what was vague and sentimental, of minuteness and anxiety, of illusion and effeminacy. He did not place the work of perfection in the delights of prayer and spiritual consolation, but in the accomplishment of duty, the correction of defects, and a ceaseless struggle against nature. Prayer and victory over self were the base of his teaching; it was characterised by courage and confidence, while peace was its fruit.

What he says in the following letter, he repeated to every person desirous of spiritual advancement:—

"I thank God for preserving in you the constant desire of promoting in yourself the growth of all spiritual perfection. The first condition of attaining this much-to-be-desired object is the most absolute faithfulness to the practice of meditation and other spiritual exercises, combined with frequent Communion. Be sure never to fail in these practices.

"If I am not mistaken, you know very well that sweetness in prayer and frequent Communion are not the end but the means. The ultimate end of all is, that union with God which cannot be attained in its fulness until we reach our heavenly country. Our immediate end here below is to correct our faults and to acquire solid virtue, for the love of

God consists much more in works than in feelings.

“Hence I wish very much that you would keep your soul detached from all the sensible consolations of piety, and serve God in simplicity and humility, whether He grant or withhold the consolations. To do this costs something, but God deserves that we should love Him for Himself.

“There is a second condition, at once the effect and the cause of our familiar intercourse with God: it is victory over our own inclinations. Let us repeat again and again, with deep and calm conviction, that the interior life, the spirit of prayer, the advance of the soul, consist, above all, in victory over self, and, consequently, in the hearty resolve to refuse God no sacrifice which He may demand.

“Courage and confidence! In all things, at all times, let us throw ourselves into the hands of the Lord. Let us, with childlike simplicity, cast ourselves into the bosom of His mercy, which is infinite.

“Peace is a precious blessing. Receive it as a pure gift from the Lord; and while you continue to follow with integrity the road traced out for you, do not trouble yourself about the interior state which God destines for you hereafter. Go on your way with confidence and rejoicing. If trials await you—and what soul escapes trials?—prepare for them by detaching yourself with fidelity from God’s gifts, that you may cling to God himself, to God alone.”

We may remark in passing, that, as we here see, this master of the spiritual life required so much detachment and forgetfulness of self, that he refused to tolerate nature in anything, even in the over-eagerness of a fervent soul to attain perfection. This has just been said by him, and was often

repeated. Nor had he more indulgence for the self-love which aims at being preferred before others, either by the director or even by God. He would say, "In all your Christian affection, go simply as your heart and the Heart of God shall direct. But do not attend to being the object of a preference. St John was the beloved disciple, but I do not at all believe that he sought to be loved above the rest by our Saviour."

Though fully impressed with the necessity of sacrifice and of struggle against self, he never allowed any to renounce the duties arising from their social position, in order to give themselves up to the pleasures of pious solitude, and of a mistaken form of interior life. It was not merely that he feared lest such eccentric seclusion would be laid to the account of religion; he saw nature appearing in such concentration on self, and the shyness of cowardice. Thus he said: "I beg and conjure you in God's name not to manifest the slightest difficulty in falling in with whatever the society in which you live may ordinarily require. There is a danger here, that of making piety boorish. People are better pleased with their own company, and they fancy it is for God's sake: the world fills them with disgust. Take care to keep your heart detached from the world. It ought always to be so detached, and is never detached sufficiently. But to allow recollection to hinder our taking part in any lawful relaxation or custom, this would be to miss the true understanding of interior life and of virtue. Take your part then with a good grace, and in a spirit of true charity, take your part; God will render you a recompense.

"The alliance which God would have between the life of this world and piety, is secured by those whose piety fills them with grace and interior peace, teaches them to practise self-conquest and constant

self-renouncement, to prefer the will of others to their own, and to let nothing but patience, sweetness, and devotedness appear in their outward deportment.

“A wife, a mother, a mistress of a family, have their perfection in their hands, beneath their feet. Holy prayer, recollection, piety, cannot produce any fruit better than attention to perform ordinary actions well, and to give real sanctity to domestic life. How many valuable opportunities may be found there for abnegation, patience, zeal, and devotedness.”

As often as F. de Ravignan met with dispositions like his own in a soul, of whatever vocation, with self-denial amounting to sacrifice, with an ardent love of suffering and humiliation, then, in his own familiar phrase, *he gave way*; his whole heart opened, and discharged itself in a flood of affection. In all the letters wherein he reveals his own soul to another soul under his direction, he is never weary of speaking of what he was never weary of loving. “The Cross!” he exclaimed; “what God Himself offers us. The Cross! let us accept it entirely, and without reserve. *To suffer and die* would be my motto, but may God’s will be accomplished. Let us pray that the Cross of Jesus may be our delight.”

“I have had the happiness,” he wrote on another occasion, “of suffering a little, a very little, during the last few days. I had been almost too well. Beg for me light, and the spirit of sacrifice. Let us adore, love, and submit. It is a life of misery; a world of misery. When shall we have ceased to be in it? Yet, in one respect, there is good in it; it has its value; it brings suffering. This is what brings us near our Lord, and unites us to His Sacred Heart. It is often accompanied by humiliation; we then have the whole of the Cross, and God enjoys a triumph.”

Another time he wrote: "To endure and to sacrifice self, this is the supreme law. Oh, when shall we so die to ourselves as to deserve to die to this world of sorrow!"

To another person he said: "May God grant us the joy of sacrifice! How else does God bless us and prove His love but by suffering? It seems as if He could not obtain His end except by this painful means. It alone leads to the most heroic and noble virtues, and it is also alone in attracting the highest graces in most abundance. All goes well so long as we have a share of the Cross."

In other letters I find the following reflections: "Really the life of the greater part of men is difficult to comprehend. Their souls are filled with this earth, its toys, its filth, its merely natural and sensible affections, its absorbing cares. What madness, what misery! How happy, then, are we to suffer while we love God!"

"I am not worthy to suffer. Oh that I could at least make reparation, toil, and pray! To suffer, yes to suffer, and to combat for love of our Lord, such is our life."

"Give God all that He asks of you, and repeat without ceasing that we must die to self—to all that is human, natural, sensible—in order to live by the crucified love of our Lord. In a faith that is dry but strong and pure, our salvation is found, our peace, however bitter it may be, and the true assurance that we shall continue faithful. God demands the most absolute interior sacrifice. To suffer, to toil, to pray—such is the lot of our souls. Only let us succeed in never hindering the execution of what God designs."

One of his spiritual sons said to him one day: "The dead only are really living." "Ah!" he answered promptly, "you never made a better remark. Have courage! Let us, with the hope of the

resurrection, try to make our habitation in heaven, and leave the things of earth here beneath our feet."

It seems useless to go to any greater length in explaining the idea which F. de Ravignan had formed of Christian perfection, and of the means to be employed for its attainment. His theory of asceticism was that of all the masters of the spiritual life, and was, in fact, that laid down in the Book of the Exercises of St Ignatius, being a methodical and practical development of the saying of our Lord Jesus Christ, "Deny yourselves; take up your Cross and follow Me." But as every science and every art is modified in its application according to the zeal and the skill of those who employ it, it will be proper to point out the peculiar character of the influence exercised by F. de Ravignan upon souls which he wished to bring to the imitation of Jesus Christ by self-denial and incessant fighting against themselves.

He was fond of these interior struggles in others no less than in himself. "God," he says in one of his letters, "God sends us sweet consolation in the midst of the labours of our ministry; as when, for example, He brings before us a soul desirous of union with the Lord by the closest ties of the interior life. This life is a mystery hidden from most men; love of the world, light and careless conduct, hinders them from tasting God's gift and appreciating it."

When he watched the course of this mysterious transformation in a soul, the joy he felt made him forget all his fatigue. One wet and rainy winter evening, after his confessional in the Rue de Varennes had long been besieged by applicants, he was preparing to leave. It was getting late, and he walked rapidly to the passage, where, about half-past twelve, he had hung up his umbrella: a nun of the Sacred Heart met him, and said,

"Father, it is raining in torrents; wait till a cab can be fetched; you cannot do any more work; you have seen half Paris, and heard their confessions." The Father raised his umbrella, and answered gaily: "I have seen very few people; I have done very little work; and I am not tired. No; I do not want any cab. What does all this matter to a religious. As soon as I got here, I set my umbrella to dry; it sheltered me as I was coming; and while the storm was beating against the glass, I was in my confessional. How happy we are to be religious! The torrent sweeps along; we mount on our bridge and watch it while it is passing."

Distance did not cause F. de Ravignan to lose sight of his spiritual children, the memory of whom he never lost. From such as were most strongly drawn by grace, or exposed to most danger in the world, he required a periodical account, of a frequency proportioned to their needs. Each letter had its own answer; his spiritual correspondence, more than any other, was carried on by return of post. I know of many collections of this kind still preserved with veneration, and containing a prodigious number of letters. When one of these souls so prized by his zeal fell into any painful or dangerous position, he was the first to write, and however long the trial lasted, he every day sent words of consolation and encouragement.

A question which concerned perfection was regarded by him as concerning eternity. After the example of the Apostle, to procure the advance of souls, he spared neither admonition nor prayer, and whether he spoke or wrote, he directed all he said to this one object; and, moved by zeal and charity, in season and out of season, he used entreaty upon entreaty. To give an idea of his style, I shall do no more than extract a few lines from his innumerable letters. He is addressing

friend to whom he speaks familiarly, as a friend of his boyhood. I must not omit his name ; Auguste de Parseval, one of those generous souls to whom no appeal is ever made in vain, was closely associated with him throughout life, yet more closely, I hope, in death.

“My dear Auguste, allow my soul always to follow yours, like a friend, a faithful companion, and believe me that God has permanently placed in the bottom of my heart the most affectionate, pious interest, in all that concerns you and your happiness. In my prayers at the holy altar I will strive to promote your happiness ; I will strive with tears, with toil, with all the weapons my religious life supplies.

“My dear friend, I must have your soul, your salvation. Pardon the language my zeal dictates, but I cannot reconcile myself to the idea of a half-good for you, a half-will. Think, Auguste, what it is once really to wish all that God wishes ! My prayer is always joined with yours. One thought troubles me : I know myself, and that I am fit only to be a hindrance, an obstacle ; many others are far more deserving of your confidence. What a grief it is to be unable to help you ! My countless faults are the reason ; and I have so much need myself to pray and struggle ! But I do pray, I struggle, I believe, and I trust myself to God. Take courage, my soul ! Pray, then, faithfully and earnestly ; go to Confession every fortnight. I would beg this of you on my knees, do not refuse me ; I beseech you by all that is most dear, by your faith, by the remembrance of all the blessings, spiritual and temporal, wherewith God has loaded you. Remember the supplication to which friendship has urged me ; your soul is most dear to me, and for it I would give my life. My Master gave His life for you.

"Let us be united in prayer and hope. God is Goodness Itself. Mary is our Mother. My dear good Auguste, I love you tenderly, and your happiness is the desire of my heart.

"Write to me frequently, I beg; I ought to know how it fares with that soul which God has in a manner entrusted to me."

As often as the timid and faint-hearted, under the direction of F. de Ravignan, showed fear of him and of the perfection to which he wished to lead them, his zeal would become full of delicacy and forbearance. He devoted as much as eighteen months to gaining one of these to confidence. Let us hear how he himself relates the means by which this triumph over his fears was gained. It was during one of the Holy Week Retreats at Notre-Dame. The orator had been speaking on the great truths with the utmost energy: "I shall never forget it: an attendant came with a great bustle to fetch me from my place, saying that F. de Ravignan wanted to speak to me. I found him standing in the sacristy in the midst of the Canons, who were very much surprised at my boldness; he received me with thanks for my coming. He said that he had a favour to ask of me, and he led me into the inner sacristy. Here the matchless orator, on the words of whose lips hung so many high intellects, so many generous hearts, busied himself with the impression produced on me by his admirable eloquence. 'I noticed you,' he said; 'at every word I felt the fear and alarm that you would suffer. I could have wished to be more moderate in my expressions; I was moved by the contrition, the repentance visible in your countenance. Poor child, I thought, what harm I am doing him! Interiorly I prayed God to give you comfort, whilst against my will I gave you affliction. Pardon the severity I used just now, there is none in my heart; you

will find in my heart nothing but the pity of a most tender father. Come, make your confession.' It was Good Friday ; he was altogether exhausted with fatigue : but he was convinced that if I fell into despair he would have failed to win my soul. In the whole universe he had but one thing to do, to gain my confidence."

We might well expect to find in F. de Ravignan's spiritual direction that positive character, that firmness and vigour, which we saw in his oratory, and in his discharge of his duties as Superior ; but in his direction of souls, more than elsewhere, humility and charity softened the force of his authority, while it was regulated by prudence.

He was asked, one day, how he had attained to self-mastery: "There were two of us," he answered; "I threw one out of the window, so that only I remained where I was." His wish was that all his penitents would get rid of the *old man* with the like determination.

A mother was seized with alarm, and cried out, "It must be acknowledged that I am very unfortunate: my two children are already dreadfully fond of detachment, and they are under F. de Ravignan's direction, and he openly professes to teach it." The Father, when he heard of it, was very much pleased with the expression, and replied laughingly, "Professor of detachment; very good. Yes, I do profess detachment;" then suddenly growing serious, "What!" he went on, "are we to remain clogged by things that are outside us and changeable, and shall we not have that holy folly which breaks through and tears off whatever impedes the soul? Priests and Religious, what have we to do with the earth, the world? My Saviour, sacrifice of self for Thee is all that deserves our attention. I know there is always something in us which would fain rise to notice; let us mount to those higher

levels, to which we ascend by prayer, and where we are maintained by prayer. Let us throw off the load of sorrow that earth lays on us, and fix our hearts on high and far from earth."

These higher levels of the soul where F. de Ravignan found peace, and where he wished to lead others to find it, remind me of an instance of the vigorous style in which, when he saw the right occasion, he would offer consolation. He was once on the point of entering his confessional where a great many people were waiting; a person, labouring in mind under a severe blow, stopped him in the gallery leading to the chapel, and said, "Father, I am ready to die of suffering, allow me one word, I beg." "Well," he answered, "I have only two minutes to spare you; tell me very briefly what you are dying of." The story was soon told: the person had been calumniated by a false friend. "It is certainly a great affliction," answered the Father, with an expression of the tenderest compassion; "but is there not something *better* within you, to forget and to pardon? Raise yourself by prayer to this higher level of faith, and then be happy and go in peace." The counsel was adopted, and peace was restored.

A lady suffered a great struggle between her affection and her faith, on account of an expected vocation in her family. F. de Ravignan believed the vocation to be true, and wrote to the lady with all the authority of the Gospel. The sentence fell on her like a thunderbolt. The poor mother was rendered perfectly downcast; she did not dare to give a second perusal to this too terrible letter; she could not even bear to look at it, and hastily concealed it at the bottom of a desk. But the letter had already wrought its effect, and the wished-for permission was not withheld.

When once F. de Ravignan was convinced that

God had given a call to evangelical perfection, he would have no more compromise, but decisive action. He cut, he thrust, he called on the hesitating soul to surrender, to love all for the sake of gaining all. We have mentioned the holy death of the Countess Albert de la Ferronnays, in the narrow cell to which she had retired ; she at first went through a severe struggle with the world and her family. Let us see with how firm a hand her director in his letters strengthened her resolution.

“What more have you to seek for, what schemes to lay, what to listen for or to examine ? No man’s opinion on the other side would affect my conviction. Rest fully, then, on the previous determination. Our families ? Our Lord counsels us to leave our families to attain evangelical perfection ; there is some loss to the soul and to the spiritual life in these habits, lawful as they are under other circumstances, and in the servitude of petty and useless compliances.

“When you write to your mother, of course you will reassure her as to your position, as to your manner of living ; and you can, it is your duty always to, speak to her with great warmth of affection, and say that you pray for her ; that you are at peace, happy in your practices of piety, and that you wish she shared this heavenly delight. Then, alone before God, with the spirit and the letter of the Gospel in your heart, recall to mind that you are dedicated wholly to God, to the good of souls, and to the poor ; and that in you it is true charity, true devotion, true prudence, to live apart from family life, since, in your circumstances, this enables you to live close to God, to live a spiritual life for the sake of God alone. There is here no want of duty to a mother ; I can hardly think you said it seriously.

“With the view of God before you, and recollected

in prayer, consider the worth of your mother's loving reproaches, and judge them aright. Pray for her ; removed to a distance, your prayer for her will have far more efficacy ; believe me, I am convinced that your presence would be no benefit to these souls so properly beloved. It is clear to me that your absence, your prayers, the desire to see you again, do much more to bring them to God and to thoughts of faith, than all your words would be able to accomplish.

"As to all that may be said, even in your presence, listen with patience, repress even the least bitterness of feeling, and go on your way with joy in the holy liberty of the children of God. In my eyes and in yours, the judgments of all the world are of no account.

"Have faith in the position you hold, and cling to it courageously. Be simple, trustful, generous, and free in the hand of God ; may He always direct and conduct you, covering you always like a beloved child with His protection !"

It must, however, be acknowledged that F. de Ravignan often showed a degree of vivacity, of quickness in his conduct, which had the effect of filling some persons with apprehension. To some characters a certain slowness of behaviour is almost necessary : through slowness in their own action, or through the embarrassment under which they labour, they do not always understand with readiness, and they do not speak openly enough. The necessity arising from his occupation, no less than character, forced him to be short and quick. He thought that if we ought to leave ninety-nine just men for the sake of one sinner, we must not leave ninety-nine sinners for the sake of one that is righteous.

A person once gave him a reproof for this appearance of hurry, which tended to close men's hearts

and lips. If there were any fault in him, he redeemed it by a virtue. In his answer, he changed places with his penitent, and began himself to make a confession : " It is quite true, and I accuse myself of it to you ; there is a shortness about my words which makes them unfit to fill a suffering heart with strength and consolation. I am only too sensible of it : it expresses not my wishes and my will, but the state of my poor soul ; it is dry and barren, pursued and overwhelmed in its weakness by a multitude of details, by charitable works, correspondence, anxieties of every kind ; what good can it produce. I am fully aware how helpless I am in the matter, and I am continually filled with astonishment at the graces which the Lord has found means to attach to my words, and at the confidence which those around me have often testified.

" You are quite right to speak to me with perfect freedom ; you can and ought always to speak so ; I feel I have peculiar reason to thank you, and I do so with all my heart."

The officious person who gave this advice was quite confused at seeing it so well received, and began to make excuses : F. de Ravignan hastened to reassure him : " Do not be uneasy : the remark you made to me with so much kindness and charity confirms me in my own conclusion. It is only too true, my wretched nature is good for nothing but to offer hindrances. And I must beg you always to speak to me with freedom, and to act with even more liberty. Scold me well, you will do me a great deal of good.—Your poor Father in our Lord, who recommends himself to your charity."

This humility in the director came forward, when needful, to correct a certain asperity in his zeal, by the too great vigour and determination of which some persons were occasionally disconcerted. This humility shows itself in every page of his spiritual

correspondence. We have picked out here and there a few passages :—

“Do not think that I am able to do you any good. Pray sometimes for the great needs my soul experiences.”

“It is only too true, I am an unfortunate obstacle to you and others. Ask God to pardon my iniquities.”

“What I cannot understand is, that my words can give you any comfort. It would be a mystery, did we not know that God, in doing good, uses the vilest instruments.”

“Do not persuade yourself that I have been able to draw any grace upon you. No; in the sight of God and of men, I can do nothing but put hindrances in the way of good, and give a great opportunity for the exercise of patience. I am utterly unworthy. The sight of me can move our Lord only to compassion. So do not think, do not say that I have assisted you. I feel an actual need to wish for your advancement as I do, but I have nothing to give to others.”

F. de Ravignan believed every one else to be better than himself; this feeling was deeply imprinted in his heart, and appeared in all his spiritual intercourse, by word of mouth or in writing. “What a noble soul!” he would sometimes exclaim; “how comes it that God sends to one so unworthy as me such support and consolation? I am convinced that God in His goodness, His amazing goodness towards His unworthy servant, arranges these meetings, in order to fill me with confusion and bring me to repentance; for I have nothing to impart to souls like these, from which I receive everything; my place is to be their teacher; I am nothing but their scholar.” He could not bear to be spoken to differently. His humility made him delicate and susceptible; and he received as great a wound from

a compliment as others receive from an insult, and was as much shocked at a word of praise as at a falsehood or a blasphemy. His very virtue, which rendered him so patient on other occasions, would fill him with holy indignation; and I can safely say that praise was the only thing which he could not endure from his penitents. "Never tell a priest, a religious, that admiration is felt for the results of his labour in thought and composition; it is bad to use such flattery. Excuse me, you asked me to find fault with you; you see I use the permission." This reproof was addressed to a princess.

I have heard of the case of one person who was reprimanded with much greater severity. She had gone so far as to call F. de Ravignan a saint. His answer was: "You are a pious and devout Christian; you will understand my complaint of you; it is sincere and full of respect. You write to me, you speak to me in language which always gives me real pain. You tell me that when addressing me you are addressing a saint! Why, this comes very near blasphemy! and my saying this is no act of humility. Believe me, I deserve nothing but pity at the most; I beg, but do not deserve your prayers. Never, then, speak to me except as to a poor priest, penitent, without a single virtue or other good quality, on whom God has heaped graces to which he cannot correspond. I assure you that you give me great annoyance when you use such language. I beg you not to do so any more. And then all these compliments! all this exaggerated enthusiasm for my poor words! It is not right; no, it is not right. We know that grace can work with the worst tools; and when I speak, this sometimes happens."

This is the proper place to make known a little artifice, by the use of which F. de Ravignan could almost certainly be caught and detained. Some

people discovered a real weakness in him, and were not slow to attack him on this side, and secure a victory; when it was thought he was inclined to break off an interview too soon, if a few bad compliments were paid him, the point was gained. He would at once change his tone of voice and expression of countenance; he felt quite at his ease, lost much of his reserve, and had always plenty of time at the service of humility. After a time he was told of the trick, of which he had no suspicion; he laughed heartily, but did not change his conduct.

F. de Ravignan's charity was more attractive than even his humility; the one, in fact, was connected with the other. He bestowed his affection on all who gave him their confidence, and with his affection he showed them the most tender sympathy and disinterested generosity.

In the depths of his manly character might be found the warmest sensibility. His lot was to share the sorrow of others much oftener than their joy; on every side of him he saw the grief or the weakness of souls under trial, or souls in danger; and on some side or other his heart was never without cause for mourning. I still seem to hear him exclaim in his grief, "We must then come to repeating the universally applicable truth everywhere—the Cross! We cannot open a letter, we cannot receive the confidence of a soul, without reading or hearing of tribulation. Death will come at last, and we may well long for it!"

He wrote to one of his Brethren, who was under his spiritual direction: "My letters can have but ill expressed the depth of sorrow I experience when I think of your sufferings. If by remaining useless, and by suffering, I could do anything towards drawing down on you the grace and strength which your zeal uses so well, I should be well content to do

nothing and to suffer. But let us be silent, and adore the sovereign love of our Master."

Quotations of this kind might easily be multiplied. The whole of the spiritual correspondence of F. de Ravignan is full of expressions dictated by compassion, and of the outpourings of his soul. We may appeal to the passages we brought forward when speaking of his zeal; they all breathe a spirit of the tenderest charity.

Lastly, I have no need to enlarge on the prudence of a man who, while engaged in managing complicated business, and in settling points of the utmost delicacy, was sometimes charged with excess of moderation, never with ill-considered precipitation. Prudence no less than vigour characterised his views on the spiritual life, which were formed in the school of the Exercises of St Ignatius. Before urging any soul to further advance in the way of perfection, he consulted not the inspirations of grace only, but the dictates of reason; he considered what could be borne by the person's character, and even by his constitution.

In spiritual direction, the point of most importance and of most difficulty is, that the director should adapt himself to his various penitents, in order to form in each the likeness of God. The director must not lead all others by the road wherein he himself walks, nor conduct every person along the same path; the treatment required by men varies no less than their characters; each soul casts its seed and reaps its harvest in its own furrow, that there may be some gradation in merit, various shades in virtue, and that in the unity of the glory of heaven there may be variety. F. de Ravignan had a marvellous gift of spiritual discernment and nice perception. When once he had discovered the inclinations and capabilities of the person, pressing and yielding by turns, he in one

case remained within the unchanging round of the commandments ; in another he launched out into the boundless ocean of the counsels. His great study was to follow the call of God, and to lead others to pay it the same attention ; thus he modelled his own conduct on the action of grace, and at the same time accommodated it to nature, with the view of uniting the highest degrees of vigour and sweetness. His vigour caused weariness only to those persons who had heard the voice of God, but displayed a spirit of cowardice or rebellion.

But as often as the wise director met a soul which was generous and faithful to God, but impeded by exterior obstacles in the performance of duty, he would then join force to prudence in giving support ; he took no heed of difficulties raised by man, and rather than abandon such a soul he would have moved the universe. A young lady, a Protestant, of a wealthy American family, had lately embraced the true religion in France. The father of the convert was full of hatred for the truth, and became the enemy of his own flesh and blood. He removed the young Catholic from Paris, carried her beyond the sea, confined her in a house buried deep amid the forests of the New World, and did not hesitate, by systematic corruption, to attempt to uproot her faith by destroying her virtue. F. de Ravignan heard of her cruel position, and became anxious and sad, was moved even to tears. He unexpectedly heard that the young captive had escaped from her terrible imprisonment, had crossed the seas, and come to ask her adopted country, France, to secure her at least liberty of soul. It was a delicate matter ; the business would no doubt be taken in hand by the ambassador of a friendly power, and at his request a search for the fugitive would be made by order of the Government. There was

some risk to be run, which F. de Ravignan both foresaw and escaped. He was resolved to protect innocence to the utmost, and had already laid his plans for imploring the assistance of the highest authority. But matters did not go so far: the young lady was able to pass through France undiscovered, and reach a land of liberty; and there her constancy at length convinced the father how useless and unjust was his persecution.

God more than once granted a direct sanction to the decisions of the director, who never failed to seek to learn His will by prayer and meditation: we will relate one remarkable instance. The story shall be told in F. de Ravignan's own words. I copy from an account drawn up in his own hand.

“Mademoiselle de X—— fell ill about the beginning of 1850. She was a person of great piety; from this time forward, for a space of eighteen months, she was a prey to the most cruel suffering, to terrible convulsions, and to distressing symptoms of the strangest character. The disease appeared to have its principal seat in the stomach, whence its effects spread over the whole system.

“In the month of November 1850, I was summoned to give her the help and consolation of my ministry. From this date, with the exception of the two months spent in my visit to England, I visited her every week or ten days at Passy, near Paris, where she was residing with her family.

“It was impossible not to feel deeply the state of this good child. Her language, her openness of soul, often moved me even to tears.

“F. Claver had just been beatified. F. Superior, who had visited the invalid during my journey to England, conceived the happy thought of seeking to obtain her cure by a novena to the newly beatified Saint. I took to Passy a small particle of the

bones of B. Peter Claver, and proposed a novena from the 23d of October to the 1st of November. The young lady had often said to me, in the course of her cruel sickness, that she was glad to suffer ; that God gave her consolation, and loaded her with graces ; that she preferred her present state to good health, and to life in the world. When I told her of the novena, she seemed downcast, and said, ‘ But I have no wish to be cured, I am so happy ! If I were in better health, I should be afraid of not serving God as well.’

“ For my part I was acting under obedience to my Superior ; it was her duty to obey me, and I enjoined the novena : a *Pater* and *Ave* every day, with an invocation of Blessed Peter, and to wear the relic upon her person. Every day I said Mass at half-past six for the success of the novena, and every day the invalid was punctual in uniting in spirit with the Holy Sacrifice. From a desire to obey, she prayed with fervour and confidence ; in renouncing her sufferings, she had made a great sacrifice. Her confidence became so strong and so calm that, in the middle of the novena, she said to me, ‘ I am sure to be cured.’ Every day she said a prayer of her own composition, from which I give an extract :—

“ ‘ I beg Thee, O adorable and eternal God, to work a miracle on me in honour of the blessed Saint I am invoking. Restore my health, for the comfort of those who love me, but not for my own, for I have no desire that my ailments should cease ; my soul was happy in suffering. It is Thy will, Lord, that my pains cease at the moment when I have attained to love of them. It is a trial, but I accept it with joy for Thy glory. My strongest desire is to be able to serve Thee in a special manner, to live only for Thee, continually to have fresh trials to endure. But let Thy will, not mine, be

done. This is why I repeat with confidence, *Blessed Peter Claver, pray for me.*

"The sick girl declared confidently that she should be completely cured on All Saints Day, the last day of the novena. She told them to get a bonnet and shoes ready for her. On Friday, October 31, she sent her mother to let me know that she intended coming to hear Mass on the following day, and to receive Holy Communion; she was sure she would be able.

"On Saturday, November 1, 1851, at six in the morning, or even earlier, the invalid, her sister, and everybody in the house was astir. Mademoiselle de X—— walked easily down the stairs, jumped into the carriage, and during the half-hour occupied in going from Passy to the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, in Paris, the jolting of the vehicle over the pavement did not bring on any symptom of her malady. She came to the sacristy of the chapel where I was waiting. We were all filled with joy and confidence. I heard her Confession. As she came in, she said to me, 'I am very well, though I still feel something of my sickness; but during Mass it will cease, and I shall be completely cured.'

"I may say, for my part, that I never ceased during the whole novena to feel great interior confidence.

"She heard Mass, kneeling almost all the time, and with the deepest recollection. After we had made our thanksgiving, I noticed that she was full of joy and peace; there was no weakness, no period of convalescence, no pain, no traces of her cruel sufferings; she drove to several places in Paris, still fasting. She reached home again at eleven o'clock, took a very good breakfast, and returned to the church on foot, although the distance from her house is considerable.

"She had been attended by one of the best known physicians of Paris; on the day after this instantaneous cure, he wrote to his patient's father, who was absent from home, as follows: 'She is now completely recovered: who cured her? The great Physician, Whose service is my happiness, Who in everything goes straight to His object, without error or hesitation. In all that I have witnessed I cannot see any room for the pride of science. I say it again, my part is to worship and bless, and I reserve to myself the office of giving my testimony, for the glory of Him Who has no need of my testimony, but expects of me that I render homage to truth.'

"We are all filled with astonishment and consolation, and most fully share the physician's conviction. We give thanks to the Author of all good, and with most lively faith repeat, *Blessed Peter Claver, pray for us.*"

This account bears date December 29, 1851. Two years after, F. de Ravignan again took up his pen to relate a second cure, which gave assurance of the reality of the first, and disclosed a new design of God.

"After the novena to B. Peter Claver, which had been followed by her perfect cure, Mademoiselle de X—— became interiorly convinced that God was calling her to the religious life: she chose the Order of the Sacred Heart. Like a dutiful child, she informed her mother of her vocation; and after a violent internal struggle, the mother courageously made her sacrifice. As soon as the matter was mentioned to the father, he set his face against it, declaring that he should oppose any such step as long as his daughter remained under age; she was eighteen at the time. The father was obstinate in his opposition for several months, and the daughter

was exposed by him to painful trials. God had His own designs.

“The young lady was constant in prayer : she was not allowed to see her director, and she found great difficulty in even corresponding with him. Her mental sufferings brought on sufferings in the body. Her terrible malady, which had totally disappeared, declared its presence anew by symptoms and attacks of a frightful character. It was a return of the same disease ; it could not be mistaken. The father was overwhelmed with sorrow : the patient declared that there was but one way to effect a cure, which was to send her at once to the Noviciate, but that there was no time to be lost. The father’s resistance was overcome.”

F. de Ravignan’s recital breaks off at this point, having been interrupted by his own ill health in 1852 ; but the remaining events passed under my own eyes, and I am able myself to complete the narrative.

The occurrences last mentioned took place in the country. Directly the father resolved to make no more opposition to his daughter’s vocation, the mother hastened to Paris, and sent for me to ask my advice : what was to be done ? The sick girl would sink if she remained where she was ; but was not the prospect as bad, or even worse, if she left home ? She was scarcely able to bear any motion, much less a long journey.

I referred the matter to F. de Ravignan, who was himself out of health at the time ; he did not hesitate at all, but said, with a wonderful degree of confidence, “God desires to have this child ; let them take her at once, dead or alive. But no, God desires to have her alive. The past gives us a guarantee of the future ; and He Who cured her the first time, can well work a second cure.” I

reported the stern answer : the mother left Paris at once, and soon returned, conducting her daughter, completely recovered, to the door of the Noviciate. Between the sickness, which had reduced her to extremity, and the restoration of perfect health, the only interval was the signal of departure.





CHAPTER XIX.

INTERCOURSE WITH VARIOUS PERSONS.

General View of the Amount and Nature of the Correspondence kept up by F. de Ravignan, and of the Visits paid or received by him — His own Room and the Parlour.

FROM all that we have so far said respecting F. de Ravignan's ministry in the confessional and in the pulpit, it is easy to gather that he could not have had an instant to himself. But we shall understand this still better if we take a general view of the whole mass of the intercourse he maintained with a multitude of persons on most various subjects. When we have taken into account the immense number of letters which he had to write, and of visits to pay or to receive, we shall have a fuller idea not only of the extent to which his time was occupied, and of the ardour of his zeal, but also of his clearness of mind and determination. Had he been less collected and strong in will, he would have been overtaken, and would have sunk sooner beneath the load. We will begin with his correspondence on subjects connected with his ministry, often running to a very great length, which he kept up with a multitude of persons in France and elsewhere. His zeal

led to his having intercourse with almost all the prominent Catholics of our time, insomuch that he was called the "Spiritual Father of his generation." This name was applied to him, I do not know under what circumstances, by M. Lenormant, one of the most eminent of the members of the Institute, whose death religion and science have just been deploring. F. de Ravignan's letters came in from every direction, not only from all parts of France, but from all the countries of Europe, especially Russia, England, Germany, and Italy; and he returned an answer to each letter.

I must say that his zeal in this respect always seemed to me rather to be admired than imitated. I still feel surprise how, in so busy a life, he was able to write so many pages. He allowed himself only two weeks of rest in the year, and he devoted these to his Retreats. During this time he allowed his letters to accumulate at his door, and held no communication with any, either by letter with the absent, or by word of mouth with visitors, though they might be men of worldly rank and influence, or even princes of the Church. But with the exception of this time, which he set aside for the repose of his soul, he never relaxed, not even when travelling nor in time of sickness. With an exactness that never varied, he every morning completed the answers to the letters of the previous day, an ungrateful task, the end of which only led to beginning anew. Every evening the new letters might be seen on his table, in a heap on the left hand, and every morning there were the same number of answers laid out on the right.

F. de Ravignan wrote almost as quickly as he spoke. I seem still to hear the sound of his steel pen as it hurried over the paper. His correspondence was exposed to be interrupted every moment by visitors; he immediately laid down his pen, and,

looking up with the air of being disengaged and having nothing to do, he received the new-comer with an exclamation of joy; and when the interview was over, he resumed his interrupted writing with a zeal stimulated by the delay.

It is difficult to understand how so many letters, written so hastily, and almost always in the midst of embarrassment and distraction, should still be all, or nearly all, perfect in form. We find in them the most perfect courtesy and graceful delicacy; each person is addressed in a suitable style, though the writer never forgot his own: he says everything as he wished to say it, and as it ought to be said, forcing the civil phrases of the world to serve the purposes of religious simplicity. The letters seem to me to be models of epistolary style for the use of priests. Not a single word can be discovered that is vain or inflated, not a page that is not apostolic; in his writings he is still preaching, goes straight to the soul, and speaks to it of God.

One of the last letters written by F. de Ravignan to Count Molé, who was sinking under the weight of age and suffering, will both show us the zeal which was always ready to answer the call of tried souls, and serve as a specimen of the literature which found inspiration in the ideas of heaven and eternity.

"I must tell you," he wrote to the noble old man, "that at any time, or in any place, if there is an increase in your sufferings, if my presence would be any comfort to you, my duty and affection would combine to carry me to you immediately. My joy is in the confidence you place in me; and I beg God to bless the connection which He has established between us.

"Thus, then, we must pass through numberless tribulations until we reach the spot appointed for our repose. With eye fixed in faith on that which

abides and does not pass away, let us raise ourselves above all transitory impressions and circumstances. God requires of us thus to raise our minds, to do which is assuredly our chief strength, our noblest dignity. Life is a race, with heaven for its goal, and all that busies or disturbs the earth is merely accessory, to the interest of which the designs of Providence give measure and value. Providence directs all events, joys and sufferings, to the sanctification of the elect. A quarter of an hour spent in recollected prayer and love of God brings light and peace and power. You have often experienced this in your long and honourable career.

“But excuse me. I hardly know what I am saying to you. To chat with you is almost like talking with myself; and I must say that my inmost thoughts and feelings lead me to measure all things according to their value for eternity. In this view, how many petty things there are of which we should make little account!”

Count Molé understood this language; he answered: “While I know how much your friends love you, I can never forget how much you love them. My very dear Father, I have said it to you before, and I am fond of repeating it; the feeling of love, mingled with respect, with which you have inspired me, the full measure of kindness you show me, are among the greatest benefits God could confer on my old age.”

We may be allowed to quote another letter of consolation, written in great haste on the evening of one of the days which were the busiest in the life of F. de Ravignan, and the best suited to his tastes. It bears date the Feast of St Ignatius, and is addressed to one of his brethren in religion, to whom he was also director. The rapidity with which he wrote, and the openness of a holy friendship, may both be perceived: “At the time I am

writing to you, the day is drawing to its close ; but from its opening I felt drawn to unite my soul with yours, that I might lead it the nearer to our holy Father. It is so certain that he loves you like a favourite child that my heart is filled with a feeling full of regret, but sweet withal ; and whatever is least bad in me is attracted towards you. In my connection with you, and in your mere presence to my memory, I feel a beneficial effect on my interior state of which I am wholly unworthy, but for which I feel the deepest gratitude to our Lord and to you. So, my very dear Father, continue to treat me with confidence, and bear with me in your charity.

“ They tell me that you are suffering ; may St Ignatius give you some relief, and not lay on you the weight of my sins, to make you suffer on their account.

“ So you have lost your respected father ; he was of the elect ; he goes before you, but leaves you an inheritance of choicest blessings. I unite my intentions with yours ; and I will say Mass for him to whom, after God, I owe the consolation of having met you on this earth.

“ Adieu. I shall carry to the tomb my sorrow for having caused you pain instead of the consolation you deserve ; but I shall also carry thither affectionate devotion to your memory.”

If F. de Ravignan’s correspondence were printed, it would form many volumes. I have myself seen thousands of letters received, and yet more written by him. There are some persons who have shown me hundreds which they had themselves received ; and I believe that I am far from having become acquainted with all these spiritual treasures, which are stored up with veneration and in silence. How many souls to this day find comfort and counsel in their perusal !

F. de Ravignan was careful to burn all confiden-

tial letters relating to secrets of conscience or family matters, immediately on sending his answer; but he preserved all those which treated of public topics, or which came from any remarkable source, and the contents of which were wholly indifferent. In this rich collection of autographs, the eye from time to time falls on documents which would have been little expected, and coming from quarters so distant that it is strange to find them together, and bearing the same address.

In this *Life of F. de Ravignan* we can introduce only a very small part of his correspondence; and we see no easier means of bringing its extent before the reader, than that of giving some of these letters which might have been least expected to occur, either on account of the matters of which they treat, or of the persons by whom they are written, or those to whom they are addressed.

A very remarkable correspondence was that which F. de Ravignan kept up regularly with the well-known Prince Demidoff, a nobleman of Russian birth residing in Italy, an adherent of the Russian schism in fact if not by conviction, and who was supposed to be the richest man in the world. I am not sure whether they ever met; it is certain at least that this wealthy man was captivated by the poor Religious. He never failed to send every year, as a mark of his respect, a copy of the printed account of his acts of charity. God sounds men's hearts, and I doubt not that He has shown great mercy in His judgment of what seemed pharisaical ostentation, but which resulted less from pride than from eccentricity. Besides this, a frequent interchange of letters went on between the magnificent villa at Florence and the humble apartment in the Rue de Sèvres.

Men of the world found some hidden attraction in the correspondence, no less than in the conver-

sation, of F. de Ravignan ; no doubt, appreciation of his talent, character, and deserts, had their share, but above all, his virtue won esteem ; persons came to seek in him what they did not find in themselves,—that calm peace which is not of this world. Prince Demidoff's heart was worn out, and looked to the poor Religious for rest from the weariness of wealth. I will quote only a few of the words of this Lucullus of modern times ; they will afford one more testimony borne by the world to the emptiness of the world and the slavery of its votaries :—

“Why cannot I too lay down my load? Believe me that I feel my days a burden. Since I have caught sight of something beyond the accomplishment of earthly duties, I have sometimes found pain and sorrow in their performance. If I am to enjoy a few years longer of existence, I shall be placed face to face with my aspirations and my liberty. I am waiting, and I try to concentrate my attention on the object for which I am waiting. I already find that it is possible to be busy, and to labour much for worldly concerns, without losing sight of the thoughts of heaven. I am encouraged by this and comforted. Let your voice sometimes join with the voice that speaks to me. I beg you to let me have a share with you in your holy ministry. May God be your guardian and protector. This is the dearest wish that springs from my filial respect.

“DEMIDOFF.”

In 1848 F. de Ravignan wrote to M. Buchez, the President of the National Assembly :—

“Writings inspired by your sincere convictions have frequently been sent here addressed to me ; and I believe that I owe this kind and Christian attention to none but yourself. I am deeply affected

by this proof of confidence. I think that I see in the writings a thoroughly generous idea,—the idea of faith joined with the highest and most liberal view and application of universal liberty.

"I have been slower than was right in expressing my gratitude; but now that a majority of Catholic votes have placed you in the eminent position you occupy, I can no longer abstain from offering to you my thanks and congratulations. Religion and liberty expect much from you, and you will, I am sure, fulfil their expectation.

"You must excuse this step which has been taken by a priest wholly devoted to prayer and to the service of souls; his only work is to call the kingdom of God down from the highest heaven to the earth. You will always have a place in his most earnest prayers. Accept the assurance of this, and of the great esteem with which," &c.

One of the names which we might have been least prepared to meet in F. de Ravignan's collection of letters, is that of the best known of the disciples of Fourier. We will give the answer returned by the Jesuit to M. Victor Considérant:—

"I have received the letter you did me the honour to write, and the little work by which it was accompanied, and I promise you that I will read it attentively.

"Allow me to tell you that I feel no irritation against any doctrines, and still less against the persons by whom they are professed. It is true that I condemn, [and that I oppose whatever is contrary to the faith of the Catholic Church; this is my duty, and in discharging it I follow out my unalterable convictions. But I also believe in the existence of generous illusions, and in persons maintaining error in good faith; and I assure you that I am conscious of no desire but that of peace

and union among all the children of the great family."

It will be noticed that F. de Ravignan did not seek after these remarkable communications; but he knew how to avail himself of the advances made to him to cast upon souls the farthest removed from faith the seeds of salvation, which more than once bore happy fruit. A remarkable example is the following:—

F. de Ravignan had at an early period brought back to the practice of religion Mme. Cavaignac, the wife of the well-known leader of the Convention, one of the Tribunes of the old Republic of 1793, whose son was the General and Dictator of the new Republic of 1848. This truly valiant woman, cut after an antique model, remained a Roman matron in head, while her heart became thoroughly Christian; she was sincere in her political opinions, but devoted before all to her religious belief. When F. de Ravignan left Paris in 1846, he sent her to an exemplary priest and friend of his, M. Locatelli, who was then Vicaire at Notre-Dame de Lorette, and subsequently Curé at Passy; on his return in 1848, he found her raised to be mother almost of a king, her son being at the head of the executive government.

To the honour of these two persons who so quickly disappeared from the view of the world, we must say that they preserved the spirit of family in a rare degree; and whenever family feeling is pure and genuine, it is at once a guarantee of political virtue, and an introduction to religious piety. The General truly worshipped his mother. Mme. Cavaignac found no difficulty in inspiring a heart so closely linked to her own, with the sentiments which were deepest in her soul, and it seemed perfectly natural that the General should feel favourably disposed towards F. de Ravignan.

Orderlies frequently left the great Hôtel Monaco, the old residence of the Princesses of France, bearing despatches, under the official seal of the Executive, to the humble room in the Rue de Sèvres. The originals are now before us. Sometimes the mother, sometimes the son, asked the advice of F. de Ravignan on important questions concerning the Church; and I am glad to record this fact, which fully proves the uprightness of their intentions.

At that time a good many heads were full of chimerical ideas, and there were dreams of reforming the Church, like the State, and of playing at Republics everywhere. Cavaignac knew more of military tactics than of ecclesiastical discipline, but he was wise enough to ask advice before making up his mind, and thus he united good sense and good faith.

Among other things, there was talk of changing the way of electing Bishops, by the adoption of universal suffrage; of enacting that the parish clergy should not be subject to removal; of establishing theological faculties, and requiring that candidates for the offices of Curé and Bishop should be graduated members. F. de Ravignan upheld the canon law; the necessity of submitting to the decisions of the Church on all questions which concerned her authority exclusively; of consulting the Bishops and the Sovereign Pontiff; he pointed out the inconvenience and dangers of discussions in the National Assembly on points of Church discipline which were beyond its competence; and we may believe that his prudent answers had no small influence in warding off or silencing these scandalous debates.

Just at the time when General Cavaignac finished his public career, his mother, whom he was destined scarcely to survive, breathed her last with the hope

which faith inspires, leaving to her son a will containing the final expression of her religious piety, affection, and gratitude. It was a noble composition, inspired by the feelings of a mother, the faith of a Christian, and the approach of death. She gave her son her last advice, her last blessing, and conjured F. de Ravignan to save him as she herself had been saved. The General complied with the wish of one so dear; he made an appointment for an interview with the Religious, and himself read aloud his mother's last testament. During the reading he was not the only one to weep; he promised on the spot, and after a short time he came to kneel at the feet of his mother's confessor.

The remembrance of this intercourse between the Religious and the General is connected with that of a very extraordinary proposal, which was renewed for a third time in 1848, and which might have brought trouble to a soul less proof against the temptation of dignities. After the deplorable catastrophe of the barricades of June, it was necessary to name a successor to Mgr. Affre in the see of Paris, and the head of the Government at first cast his eyes on F. de Ravignan; perhaps Mme. Cavaignac was not without some influence on this choice. The inmates of the Hôtel Monaco might be excused for not knowing that the Jesuit had bound himself by an inviolable oath never to accept any ecclesiastical dignity. F. de Ravignan was kindly informed of the scheme, but he only smiled; there was nothing he feared less than the Archbishopric of Paris; he felt confident in himself, and could not believe that God would subject him to such a trial. The General understood that to overcome this one man would be a harder task than any victory in the field, and he gave over the attempt.

This temptation, which had little danger for F. de Ravignan, had already been twice presented

to him. Mgr. de Quélen had wished F. de Ravignan to be his coadjutor during his life, and to succeed to the see on his death. When he announced his strange purpose, he encountered an insurmountable obstacle in the vow taken by Jesuits. The Sovereign Pontiff alone could loose on earth that which had been bound in heaven, and the good Bishop abstained from carrying the matter to Rome; his affection for F. de Ravignan prevented his doing anything so distasteful.

The project which had been abandoned during the life of Mgr. de Quélen was revived on his death, and the subject assumed so serious a form that F. de Ravignan thought right to send information of it to F. General. He wrote on the 30th of March 1840:—"I requested F. Guidée to inform you of certain rumours afloat regarding me: what about? about the Archbishopric of Paris. God is my witness that this has certainly not proved the slightest temptation to me; you will not find it difficult to believe. Some people who make themselves busy about everything have thrown out this idea; and, what is perhaps hardest to excuse, a prelate spoke of it to the King and ministers. But, thanks be to the Lord, there is nothing serious in it, nor any ground for the slightest fear.

"The heart of your child, Very Reverend Father, feels nothing for dignities but the deepest disgust, with sincere love for the Society and his vows. One thought only has come into my mind; my pride deserved this punishment at God's hands; but I have prayed, and begged for any other chastisement."

The honours of a seat in the Academy exercised no greater attraction over the heart of the humble Religious. It was said to have been talked of in the highest quarters; and the old orator of Notre-Dame had friends and admirers in that honourable

body in sufficient numbers to justify some expectation. At least, I will give one testimony to this effect—and it would be seen to be of great weight were I at liberty to mention the name of its author, a member of the French Academy. He is a writer, distinguished alike for the elegance and purity of his style, and for the delicacy of his criticism; and he was at one time a statesman, with views little favourable to the Jesuits; he wished to express the regret he felt for not having met with F. de Ravignan for the purpose of introducing him at a meeting of the Academy. I will give the exact words of the message:—"He would have been happy to offer you a place among those reserved for the members of the Academy and the Institute, a place which would be more deservedly and more ably filled by you than by any of those by whom they are occupied, a place from which you are debarred by nothing but your vocation."

The intercourse of F. de Ravignan with two other Academicians, of whom we have so far said nothing, leads us from his correspondence to his visits. The first was once F. de Ravignan's school-fellow in the Rue de Matignon, and afterwards a well-known author; he wrote one day with that poetical grace which has given him fame:—

"I am very anxious that my name may not be entirely blotted from your memory; and I hope that separation from the world does not involve the renunciation of all childish and youthful memories.

"For my part, my dear friend, I have often taken pleasure in hearing you in the churches of Paris; and while I was lost amid the throng of your hearers, and listened to your weighty words, I could not help recognising you as the companion of my studies, whose first efforts I had heard, and as the young magistrate whom afterwards I met in

the world, mixing with my dearest friends, with those from whom I have never parted.

"Many deservedly famous men have sat on the forms of our college, and of all these, you bear the most impressive name, and that which commands the widest veneration. I have always been wishing, and have long been looking out, for an opportunity of renewing our acquaintance.

"I feel admiration for your eloquence ; but, at the same time, I love your kindness and good heart, my dear Father. This is a word which I cannot write, and which I could not press your hand and utter, without a smile and the emotion natural to a friend from boyhood, in whose mind your image always is seen with black eyes, bright and young, as those of the schoolboy. In spite of this, no one cherishes for you sentiments of sincerer reverence, in union with the feelings arising from a very old friendship."

A year after the renewal of intercourse between the two school friends, the same Academician wrote again :—"I am very glad to think of my passing a whole hour with you, my dear friend, and of hearing you talk of that calm and deep happiness which you draw from the thought of God. It pursues you even in the middle of this Pandemonium of Paris. I rely on being able to contemplate close at hand the blessedness and power of a beautiful mind which I know well, which is constantly upheld by faith in the realms of God, and which still finds indulgence for the world, to which it must at times descend. As long as we are living in this wretched world, let us forget it, while we converse with thorough sincerity of that other life, which I dream of and you behold. I already find that to write to you brings me increase of peace."

This power of a soul which has secured peace by having gained the mastery of self, enabled F. de Ravignan to acquire first the affection, and then

the confidence, of the veteran member of our three great Academies. I do not know the pretext, but I can easily guess the design of a visit paid by the Religious to this venerable Father of science and literature. The latter dared not trust his eyes, and did not understand who had been with him until the visit was over; the following kind note conveyed his apologies for the mistake :—

“SIR,—Allow me to thank you for the honour you were kind enough to do me yesterday, and to explain to you the cause why I did not fully express the sense I entertain of so great a favour. My first impulse led me to it, but it occurred to me that I had not deserved so great an honour, and that possibly I had before me only some other person bearing the same name with yourself. I was unwilling to clear up my doubt by a question which would have seemed discourteous, supposing my suspicion to turn out correct. I therefore received you with only that respect which your dress and demeanour suggested, but not with all that admiration which I feel for one of our most eloquent Christian orators. I beg you to have the kindness to pardon my reserve in consideration of the motive by which it was inspired. “BIOT.”

Nothing could have been kinder or better said. We are pleased to notice an Academician preserving the traditions of old French politeness. This first acquaintance soon led the way to a true intimacy. The old man, so often distinguished for his success, enrolled himself among F. de Ravignan's spiritual children, and we may observe the name which ever after his gratitude led him to use : “My dear, good Comforter, I am at a loss by what words to express my gratitude for your unceasing kindness. *Sir* is too cold for the feeling which

attaches me to you, and the name of friend might seem too familiar to be consistent with the respect I bear you. The word I have placed at the head of these lines does not say enough. But your kindness will pardon me, for I have been unable to find any word to express all that you are to me."

The name each one bears has been purchased by him, and if it costs much to become famous, it costs much also to be famous even when the fame comes unsought. The crowd gathers wherever there is noise. So then, that man at least is happy who is truly mortified and devoted, who holds his own soul in check while he can go out of himself to work for others!

Visits flowed in on F. de Ravignan. While men were laying siege to him in his own room, summonses were brought that women were waiting for him in the parlour; and from morning to night he was perpetually going backwards and forwards, upstairs and down. Amongst the crowd, of course, some vain curiosity would be met with, or some of that parasite eccentricity which lives on others, such as never fails to harass distinguished persons in every department, and that selfish eagerness which is found wherever influence is supposed to be exercised. But all such useless visits were at once disposed of, with the apathy of polite humility, which left no hope of success, nor desire to repeat the attempt.

Besides visits dictated by interest or curiosity, we may be sure that there were many which aimed at no more than at the satisfaction of a too human sympathy. The following incident will show us the inexorable severity with which this apostolic man, at other times so full of politeness, rejected all such intimacy which seemed to him but little in keeping with his character and the dignity of his profession. During one of his Stations in a great foreign city, a lady of high rank, who no

doubt believed that there could be no difficulty in her being enthusiastic for talent decked out by virtue, set about pursuing F. de Ravignan with her admiration. The Religious felt great annoyance at these womanish demonstrations, and his indignation was expressed with almost laughable vehemence. He caused her to be forbidden the parlour of the house where he was staying, and at last he said what put an end to her visits and messages alike. "Just imagine," he said, "she has had the audacity to send me a golden cross, begging me to wear it in remembrance of her! I had patience enough to answer, when I sent back her present, that I carried with me no cross but one of wood in my Master's service, and that love of Him turned this wood to gold."

But the visits to him usually had a better object: in them was sought advice or comfort, peace of heart and the grace of God. Every one was welcome who brought difficulties to resolve, troubles to impart, sorrows to heal, and, above all, sins to pardon. How full of sympathy F. de Ravignan then appeared and really was; full of benevolence and devotion, always ready to attend to the interests of others as heartily as to his own. He seemed to have an instinct for conferring obligations; and he earned the more gratitude because he never exacted any. He forgot himself, never talking of the good he had done any more than of the evil he suffered, and he had always leisure to give his care to others. His interest, in fact, approached the character of solicitude, and firm as he was in mind, he almost lost his peace. When he could do anything, he was seen to face all the vexation of asking favours, all the annoyance of being refused, without giving a thought to what he suffered, perhaps without feeling it: charity thinks not of it.

In this great capital of France, where life is so

vigorous and evil abounds, stranger complications are met with than occur elsewhere, and more startling contrasts ; virtues in the midst of vice ; miseries which move to pity, concealed under the most enviable exterior ; postures of affairs which can have no result but to lead on the way to Calvary ; misfortunes without hope, except on the side of heaven. F. de Ravignan every day saw these long series of troubles and embarrassments pass before his eyes, these various forms of a world in the depths of which sorrow is always found ; and when evening came, and he was alone at the foot of his crucifix, it was easy for him to say, *All is vanity, except to love God, and serve Him alone.*

“To whom shall I confide my sorrows,” wrote a distinguished personage of Paris, who found solace for his domestic troubles in neither his name, nor his title, nor his wealth—“to whom shall I confide my sorrows, if not to him who is so commonly entrusted with the knowledge of so many miseries ?”

Mme. Swetchine, whose rank and religious character required her to administer consolation to much misery in the highest ranks of society, wrote once to F. de Ravignan :—“If I did not find in myself, dear and honoured Father, the courage to approach you, I have every reason to feel encouragement whenever I appeal to your unequalled kindness. A gentleman who cherishes the most affectionate and lasting gratitude towards you, Count Polydore de la Rochefoucauld, has just suffered a most cruel blow ; his amiable and excellent wife has been taken from him a few days after giving birth to a second child.

“The character of Mme. Polydore de la Rochefoucauld comprised all that could make her loss regretted ; she was an only daughter, her mother’s sole comfort ; she was a happy wife, the only joy of her husband, who, while separated from his own

neighbourhood and his family, found in her everything. And at twenty-seven! It was really one of those blows which Providence keeps in reserve to show how vain are all goods, even those prized most lawfully and most highly.

"You may imagine poor Polydore's state of mind. We have as yet heard nothing from him beyond one line, in which he announces his misfortune to his brother, the Duke d'Estissac; but what he says is most touching, although there is not a word to belie the courage on which God had reckoned. But his strength must require support, and there is no one, dear Father, but you that can give it; no one but you, whose moving words will make more way into a heart which knows their power. My object then is, to beg you to send me a few lines for him. I know what will be their effect; they will soften him if his heart is closed against consolation; they will cheer him if cast down; they will show him more clearly how compassionate is the most detached of hearts. I know that Polydore deserves to hear your voice: his faith, his fervour, have not failed, and this I really believe even when misfortune comes to him as a teacher charged with some last and most important instruction."

F. de Ravignan had the skill to find, amidst the consolations of the faith, prompt remedies for sorrows the keenest and most profound. Sometimes a word sufficed for his purpose. A mother was inconsolable for the loss of her daughter, whose Christian life had closed with the death of one destined for glory. He did not weep with her, but adopted the tone of congratulation: "Happy mother," he exclaimed, "to have trained such a daughter for heaven!"

A lady one day came to him, despairing and crushed with I know not what sorrow. He said to her no more than this: "My child, I am glad

to see you weep in my presence ; it is a humiliation for you." This single word dried her tears.

He was forced occasionally to have recourse to human consolations ; but the Religious, whose own thoughts were all supernatural, found difficulty in understanding how it was that the hope of heaven did not suffice to cause all troubles here below to be forgotten. A lady of the world was in despair at the loss of her fortune ; in condescension to her weakness, he expressed some pity. But after leaving her, he let slip these words : " So I have been forced to call a person unfortunate because she has lost all she possessed on earth ! Strange blindness ! She did not see that she might make God wholly her own ! "

But he was happy to meet with views in accordance with what he himself entertained ; with faith vigorous amidst disasters in the natural order. A lady told him that she had made a pilgrimage to her family burying-place, and that she had looked with calmness on the place which was waiting for herself. He answered, without hesitation : " Ah, the sight of your own tomb has filled you with comfort. I am so glad to see you really meditate upon your grave. If you only knew, my child, the happiness with which your expressions fill your father's heart ! "

An author of the present generation, for whom F. de Ravignan had always felt affection, expressed to him his hope of an increase in his family in the following kind terms :—" I recommend my good wife to your prayers : she is about to bring into the world a new friend of the Society." But shortly after he was the only survivor left beside his desolate hearth, and of his blighted family nothing remained but remembrances and regret. On hearing this, F. de Ravignan was one of the first to hasten to the house of mourning : but the consoler found

that faith upheld the afflicted man, and he received this note in return for his visit :—" So this, then, is what becomes of human joys ! But, thanks be to God, your blessing abides, and my pierced heart is full of strength and consolation. What God does, He does well, I know and believe ; and I have need only of prayer that I may not lose the fruit of these sharp graces. I beg prayer from your charity, which in all my troubles is always so prompt and faithful."

Though ambition made no way with F. de Ravignan, it was not so with indigence ; and it may be said that he always had on his hands some persons suffering from the misfortunes of life, whether through casual distress or permanent necessity. Though himself devoted to a life of poverty, and living only on alms, he gave away part of what he received ; but his resources failed to meet the calls of his charity, and he became a beggar on behalf of others. In fact, as he had more intercourse with strangers, and consequently more means of relieving misfortune, his Brethren, even at a distance, sent to him the cases of distress which Providence had thrown in their way.

Many families received from him their support for several years, and he showed such pleasure in giving, that they had no shame in receiving ; it might have been thought that he was receiving the favour, and that, when he was distributing his charity, he was grateful to those who accepted it at his hands. Many young men who heard a call from the voice of Heaven and that of the law at the same time, were ransomed by him from service in the army, that they might enter the religious state. He placed many poor boys in the Bishops' Schools, and provided every year the cost of their education. Nothing can be more affecting than the following letter, written by the mother of one of

the boys, on occasion of the death of the Religious that befriended her :—

“My very dear child, I do not know whether you have heard of the misfortune that has come upon us in the death of our dear F. de Ravignan, whose loss we shall never sufficiently regret. I am so overcome that I am scarcely able to write to you. To us this loss can never be repaired, and I shall weep over it all my life. My dear child, keep carefully the *Christian's Day*, which he gave you with his own holy hands. Try to be like your protector, your best friend. Do all you can to make yourself worthy of the happiness and honour of having had the protection of this saintly Father. He will pray for us, and that is the only comfort left.”

At one time, fathers would ask his assistance to control the disorderly life of their sons ; sometimes influential families sought his mediation to shield them from the vengeance of public justice. Sometimes mothers came to seek peace of conscience by consulting him on matrimonial projects, or on inclinations manifested towards religious life. Their ideas were not always in accordance with his ; he believed that there was less risk in giving one's-self to God than in giving one's-self to men ; and it often required several interviews to bring about the entrance of a young girl into a convent.

But let us enter F. de Ravignan's room. Some men of the world, on first coming there, were much struck by everything they saw, both by the occupant, with his well-matched mixture of austerity and condescension, of dignity and modesty, and by the apartment with its unlooked for contrasts. The intellect found proof in what was seen ; and yet more, the heart found motives, and the room itself worked many conversions.

A man of high station, a former ambassador and

minister, one of the class who are ironically termed freethinkers, was once induced, by the request of a friend, to pay a visit to F. de Ravignan. He made his preparations for the interview as if for a battle ; he came equipped in armour from head to foot, full of resolution both for the attack and the defence. On entering he gave a rapid glance around him, took a near view of his distinguished host, who agreed well with what he had anticipated, and of the room, which altogether falsified his expectations. He could soon reckon up the furniture. The length and breadth of the room did not exceed a few feet, and the walls were bare and chilling ; in the middle was an uncovered table of white wood, coarsely stained with red and black ; behind this extraordinary writing-table, and within reach, was a book-case yet more extraordinary, two rough planks fastened to the wall, and bearing five or six books and a few portfolios of papers : the chimney ornaments were a little plaster image and a brass candlestick ; it was impossible to dispense with a praying-desk, with a crucifix a reliquary and two small pictures ; there were three straw-bottomed chairs. The bed was banished into the ante-room : it was merely a framework of iron, which was shut up every morning, and put away in a corner behind an old screen.

The visitor was able to notice all these details in much less time than we have employed in their description ; and it is remarkable that, in proportion as he saw, he began to believe ; his objections vanished before they were uttered. So, without entering on any argument, he held out his hand to F. de Ravignan, saying : "My dear Father, you are right, and I am a Christian. I surrender to God, and put myself in your hands."

Persons not long converted from infidelity or Protestantism often knocked at the door of this

distinguished Religious, that he might, by his words, confirm the words which grace had already wrought. One of them gave this description of the effect produced by a first visit :—" I cannot express how thankful I am to Providence, Who threw me in your way, and gave me the opportunity of hearing you. For many years I had honoured you as one of the most courageous men of our time, and as one gifted with an eloquence at once most sweet and most effective. But now I have become acquainted with the Religious, simple, affable, full of genius and gracious kindness. My son, like myself, is still under the influence of his recollections, and I am glad to hear him speak of you with an enthusiasm in which I participate."

A well-known traveller, who, writing to F. de Ravignan, signed himself, *Your very humble son in our Lord*, asked him to undertake the religious instruction of a negro boy whom he had brought back from some distant country. The poor *Adoula* had never been baptized, could not read, and could scarcely speak French. The Religious undertook the care of him with a tenderness surpassing belief, devoted more time to him than to a man, and was as attentive as he would have been to a king's son. He looked on him as a child of God.

F. de Ravignan's charity and skill in business were known; he never refused his assistance, and seldom met with opposition. Thus it happened that each day brought him fresh opportunities for the exercise of his zeal. How many there were whom a mother's voice induced to come, or whom a friend's hand led, who, in coming, considered themselves victims, but who went away beaming with joy! There were some who would bring to him, not a solitary person, but a whole troop at a time, and who kept guard at the door while the

file were passing in, to ensure that not a single one should make his escape.

Finally, we will mention a circumstance which will sum up and confirm all that we have said on the amount and nature of the intercourse kept up out of doors by F. de Ravignan. He sought and obtained from Rome in 1852 an exemption from a rule which is in force in the Society and in all well-regulated communities. Nothing short of necessity could have forced him to take this step, for he had a horror of all singularity and of dispensations, and throughout the whole course of his religious life this is the only one which he made up his mind to ask. I will give the words of the letter which he wrote to F. General on the subject, not only because it shows us the amount of his correspondence, but also because it is an example of the way in which one who truly knows how to obey will put forward a request :—

“VERY REVEREND FATHER,—For nearly eight months I have been thinking of laying before my Superiors a doubt on the application of a point of the rule in which I am concerned. Experience and reflection would lead me to request of your Paternity the *Sigillum* or right of sealing my letters, and of receiving letters unopened.

“In my heart and conscience I can say that I am not led to make this request by any feeling of independence or anything of the kind. My wish is, that all my intercourse with strangers should be known to my Superiors. But the extent of my correspondence is so great that it is a loss of time, a continually recurring trouble, to go five or six times a day to look for a Superior to seal answers which require to be sent off at once; and the interruption and trouble to my unfortunate Superior is no less than my own.

"I receive six or eight letters a day, and sometimes many more; I write the same number, and often a dozen at a time. And I write none but through necessity, or what civility absolutely requires. And when the Superior is away, or forgets to send a letter, there is unpleasantness and complaints from the people who have written to me. These are real thorns, which rob me of my peace.

"Moreover, divine Providence has caused my ministry to bring me into communication with persons of the highest rank, both in France and in foreign countries; with members of princely and reigning families; with souls which are led by grace in extraordinary paths. On considering the matter, I unhappily do not find that I can cut short or diminish this correspondence as useless. *Ad majorem Dei Gloriam.* I conceive it to be my duty to give attention to these persons, statesmen, or men of learning, these souls whom God has placed in a position to exercise a great influence for good.

"You will judge, Very Reverend Father, of the circumstances of one of your children, and you will let me know whether my request is well founded, according to the spirit of the rule. I shall receive with obedience and with joy the answer which shall come to me from your Paternity."

This chapter on the visits paid and received by F. de Ravignan, and on his correspondence, may be suitably closed by a letter from his physician, to whom the toil undergone by the patient gave plenty of work. M. Récamier was one of the most constant of his visitors; to preserve the apostolic labourer was his chief care. We must not separate the memory of the two; and in truth nothing can be more singular or more affecting than the peculiar tone of tenderness adopted by the renowned

physician, whose goodness of heart and piety were equal to his genius :—

“MY DEAR AND REVERED FATHER,—I received your note with inexpressible pleasure, arising from a great desire for the greater glory of God. You may have thought my report on your state of health long and over-minute ; but observe that I was obliged to point out how far the roots of your weakness extended, that steps suited to the serious character of the sickness might immediately be taken. This, whatever it might cost, was my duty as a professional man, and my strict obligation as a Christian.

“Keep up your courage ; invoke the aid of St Antony of Padua once every evening for the recovery of the strength you have lost, and just a decade on the Rosary to secure a good night. This will refresh the blood, strengthen the chest ; it gives joy to the heart, calms the nerves, and gives a good appetite in the morning to God’s greater glory. In fact, it is a universal panacea, as you know better than I know it myself.

“Thanks be to the thrice-holy God on your account !

“Salvation and good health be to him whose voice has so often brought faith back into souls beneath the roof of Notre-Dame ; to him whose sickness has filled us with deep sorrow, but whose recovery will give us joy. Salvation to him whom Providence is still reserving for the salvation of so many more souls. Salvation to him who is far from desiring too speedy a recompense, but who generously accepts the prospect of his future toils.”



CHAPTER XX.

HIS SHARE IN RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS.

F. de Ravignan avows his sympathy with a persecuted Church—He defends the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception: assists in the Establishment of the Congregation of the Oratory—Beginnings of the Monastery of the Pierre-qui-Vire—Memorial in favour of Freedom for the Missions to the Algerine Arabs—Discussion on the Law for Freedom of Instruction: the Law carried into Execution—The Colleges at Metz and Saint-Etienne—F. de Ravignan has an audience with the Emperor,



THE rapid picture we have drawn of the large and multifarious correspondence carried on by F. de Ravignan is naturally succeeded by some account of his share in religious questions, another source of care and trouble. Before we describe his communication with men of political influence, and the part which, in the interests of religion and the Society, he took in questions depending upon the Government, it will be well to call to mind his great moderation and prudence,

To all who endeavoured to drag him on to the political arena he answered with the liberty he had learned from his Master: What do you ask of me? *Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business?* Like a true Religious and true servant of the Church, he left debates and dissensions to the

world ; and he pursued his apostolic task without deviation under every form of government. It may well be said that he had more sympathy for one side than for another ; but in him the man was absorbed in the priest. By what political party can he be charged with opposition ? He was the partisan of order, of peace, and of liberty for doing good, an Apostle to the souls of all ; and if he was sometimes in the combat, it was as a soldier of Jesus Christ.

We may add that vocation and character alike kept F. de Ravignan completely aloof from the difference of views respecting the defence of the Church, which divided even the noblest leaders on the Catholic side. He was accustomed to dwell in a higher region, raised above the clouds of human passion, and the uproar in the valley fell on his ear, but he ceased not to beg peace from God, and to preach peace to men. He would often exclaim, "If only I could bring these minds to agreement, these hearts to union, what influence they would have in the world, what a power for good !" And accordingly, how many letters, how many schemes to bring them to union ! How often did he interpose as mediator !

At least the two parties met together, as on common ground, in friendship for F. de Ravignan, and in love for the Church. This must be acknowledged to be true of all ; all these divisions sprang from a love of good, by which they ought to have been hindered or brought to an end ; and at the very time that the reproach was being bandied about of compromising the holy cause which they were bound to defend—at the first signal of attack by the common enemy—all intestine dissension would have ceased, and we should have seen these champions, who just before had been engaged in scattered skirmishes, march like one man against

the foe, and, because they had always been brothers, become once more friends. It might, too, have been supposed that there was a mutual agreement on both sides to allow F. de Ravignan to stand aloof. A publicist, a man of deep affection and devotion, having received a severe mortification, wrote upon the subject: "You have no place in my prejudices and vexations. In my eyes, you have never for a single instant suffered any disparagement. Independently of all other motives, I should have been restrained by the deep veneration and true affection which I feel towards you."

This sort of immunity accorded to F. de Ravignan is all the more remarkable, because it was not purchased by him at the price of a cowardly neutrality. If he was by nature little likely to be led away by others, he was still less capable of compromise or of suppressing his opinion. Few men, I may say with confidence, have been more independent in thought or more truthful in language. He did not soften the truth to his friends; he cared more for profiting than for pleasing them; and he had so much love and esteem for them as to contradict at the risk of giving displeasure. This freedom was so well known to those who saw much of him, that more than once those who were about to take some step, or to publish some book which they feared he would not approve, avoided meeting him, or, it may be, fled from his pursuit. The public have often believed that he had a share in measures and writings which had not even been confided to his knowledge.

But still, however much F. de Ravignan stood apart from all the disagreements that divided his friends, he did not hold back as often as it seemed that his representations and his name were necessary to secure a suitable position to the Society for declaring its doctrines. I find among his papers a

very curious letter from Count Molé relating to some declaration of this kind : " I cannot tell you, my very dear Father, the pleasure, the satisfaction both in heart and mind, I felt on reading your admirable words, your lofty, moderate, profound expressions on the question which has so unfortunately been raised with regard to the ancient classics. I immediately called together my children and grandchildren to tell them that the Society of Jesus, which is held in such honour in my home, remained faithful to its precedents, and to the glory which its system of instruction, at once so Christian and so learned, had acquired."

Whenever the interests of religion were in jeopardy, F. de Ravignan was always ready to be sacrificed on their behalf. A Church in Germany was enduring the hostility of a persecuting government. It is due to him that the French Bishops published an expression of opinion in favour of the Bishops of the Rhenish Provinces ; and the venerable Confessor at Fribourg felt a thrill of joy at the thought that he had been persecuted for Christ Jesus' sake, and congratulated by his Brethren.

The question was shortly after raised at Rome of defining the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, and of inscribing this traditional belief in the roll of Catholic dogmas ; and men who ought first to have studied their Catechism, began to argue against the doctrine, to be very eloquent on theology, and to speak decidedly on the question, which they entirely misunderstood. Newspaper writers were suddenly enamoured of sound doctrine ; and with a zeal of very recent growth and short duration, set up for doctors of the Sorbonne, and propounded theses in which their scanty learning and their false conceptions were cleverly masked by tricks of rhetoric.

Less than this would have sufficed to give a

wrong direction to public opinion in the drawing-rooms and government offices. F. de Ravignan was deeply grieved, but did not confine himself to lamentation; the glory of the Blessed Virgin, and the infallibility of the Church, were both involved; he raised his voice, and wrote a series of articles in a religious periodical. Besides this, he urged the Bishops themselves to speak in defence of the Mother of Jesus Christ, and of His Spouse the Church.

At the same period, the Catholic world was gladdened by the re-establishment at Paris of the Oratory of St Philip Neri, which gained a new prosperity under the title of the Immaculate Conception. F. de Ravignan had a share in all the good works of his time, and he was happy enough to assist in the settlement of this fresh family of servants of the Blessed Virgin, who are always ready to relinquish the quiet course of their pious, studious ministry, as often as there arises a need of defending the interests of the Church and the honour of the Mother of God. We will give at full length a note which has been furnished us by the Rev. F. Pététot, the Superior and founder of the new congregation:

“It may truly be said that the Oratory owes its existence to F. de Ravignan. I should never have undertaken the work without his formal approval: he did more than approve.

“The first time the question was seriously debated between F. Gratry, F. de Valroger, and myself, I went to speak of it to him, as I always did in any business of the slightest importance.

“At that time our ideas were far from being definite or perfect. On the other side, I was not very enthusiastic for the project, with which, although I felt interest in it, I had long believed it my duty to remain unconnected. It was under

these circumstances that I spoke to him. He did not approve, and especially he thought I ought not to leave my position to give myself up to the plan.

"Shortly after, he had occasion to meet F. Gratry at Orleans: this Father entered into the project much more heartily than myself, and talked to F. de Ravignan of it at some length. By this time, subsequently to my first conversation with F. de Ravignan, my own views, as well as those of F. Gratry and F. de Valroger, had made an advance; our views had become clearer, more precise, more extensive; and the conversation with F. Gratry took place under these altered circumstances. Moreover, F. de Ravignan's views had undergone a complete change; and when next I met him, he said that now he much liked the idea of the scheme, that he was anxious for it, and was sorry it was not carried out. These are his exact words. They very much changed my views and inclinations, and formed the marked starting-point of all that has since been done.

"After the Oratory had been actually established, he never ceased to testify towards it the most sincere and lively interest; and, in particular, he was kind enough to preach at the opening of our chapel; and on this occasion he expressed, as he so well knew how, the kindest wishes for the future of the young undertaking."

The new Oratory had scarcely been erected when F. de Ravignan suggested the thought of it to the pious Count Schouvaloff, who was at the time deliberating on his vocation and on the choice of a religious order. He wrote in November 30, 1854: "I think that a Congregation, such as the Oratory for example, would suit you well. You would there find religious life in all but the vows, in the priesthood, toil and zeal. You know that F. Pététot, with F. Gratry and F. de Valroger,

have restored the institute of the Oratorians in France under a new form, and with new securities. I feel we can give them implicit confidence. It is a holy, religious enterprise."

On the occasion of the last Councils, when each ecclesiastical province in France, under the auspices of the Republic, entered on an era of liberty, and resumed the exercise of its ancient rights without opposition or interference, F. de Ravignan was more than once summoned to take part in these peaceful assemblies. He was present at the Council of Paris as theologian to Mgr. Sibour, and held the same office under the Bishop of Moulins at the Council of Sens. He had also promised to accompany Mgr. Morlot, the Archbishop of Tours, to the Council of Rennes, but sickness released him from the duty.

In connection with the Council of Sens we may be allowed to make a digression which will at least give edification. At this Council, F. de Ravignan met the Rev. F. Muard, and holy men do not meet without uniting; their mutual recognition is instinctive, and they incline to make known to each other their views and feelings. That the new friendship between the two Apostles may be understood, it seems necessary to give a rapid sketch of the previous career of this venerable priest.

It is twenty years since the Abbé Muard, then a priest of the diocese of Sens, conceived the thought of giving up the pastoral ministry, and devoting himself to the life of a missionary. He obtained the authorisation of the Archbishop of Sens for the establishment of a Congregation of priests in the old monastery of Pontigny. After some years passed in this place he felt urged by an interior voice, and wishing to embrace an austerer life, to make a more complete sacrifice, he left his Congregation, which is still in existence.

In the fervour gained by a retreat, and after most ardent prayer, he began a new form of life; the austerity of an anchorite joined to the labour of a missionary. He soon found, even in the very neighbourhood, companions resolved to follow his footsteps. In 1848 he set out for Italy, and his efforts were encouraged by a verbal approbation received from the Pope, who was then at Gaeta. He made application at the monastery of Subiaco, was received, and there studied the rule of St Benedict. A few months after, he began to build his monastery of Pierre-qui-Vire, at a wild spot in the Morvan.

Just at this time the Council of Sens was held. F. Muard wrote to the Countess de Chastellux: "I cannot tell you how glad I was to meet F. de Ravignan. I had two conversations with him. I explained to him the end of our Society, and the means which we proposed to use for its attainment. He was particularly impressed with the idea of uniting expiation to preaching. He frequently repeated that our work was the work of God; that we must go forward, fearing nothing; that our association would be blessed by the Lord, and would do much for the good of souls."

Now let us see the impressions made on F. de Ravignan; they are recorded in a letter, written at a later period, to the same Countess de Chastellux, the Protectress of the rising monastery, a title giving more glory to her noble family than all the titles of the world. "How thankful I am to you," he said, "for sending me the account of the clothing and consecration of this holy Religious! I was much affected by seeing and conversing with F. Muard at Sens. I felt my whole soul drawn towards his, and I wish we could remain together. It is quite right to join expiation to

preaching, prayer, and the works of a Christian life. I feel this more than ever."

On June 19, 1854, the founder of Pierre-qui-Vire died, with a reputation for sanctity. F. de Ravignan wrote: "I was surprised and deeply affected by the news of the death of F. Muard. We see that God's thoughts are not as man's thoughts! We might have supposed the life of that venerable man necessary, but nothing is necessary. At any rate, his example and the lessons he taught will not be lost. To me in particular the remembrance of him will be beneficial and dear, and I beg God to preserve it in my mind. May I follow his path to heaven!" F. de Ravignan was asked to preach at his funeral; he was sorry to be unable to comply. Four years later the two met again in a better life. During his last sickness he received with joy a relic of his holy friend, pressed it to his lips, and wore it close to his heart. The relic was afterwards sent back to the family of Chastellux, who preserve it still as having a double value. The new Superior of Pierre-qui-Vire was present at the funeral of the friend of F. Muard; it seemed that Providence had brought him there expressly to represent in the midst of the throng that religious family which had found a blessing in the sympathy of F. de Ravignan.

The Bishop of Algiers wrote to the Minister of War, seeking leave for preaching the Gospel to the Arabs. Political reasons had induced the Government to forbid all missions among the tribes. And yet, in order to make the conquered nation a French race, was it not necessary first to make them Christian? The prelate spoke in the name of civilisation, of France, and of the Church; F. de Ravignan was commissioned to present the Memorial, and spoke in the name of the Society,

the co-operation of which he offered. Accordingly, on October 5, 1850, he addressed to the Minister a note, in his own name, to the following effect :—

“The Gospel is preached everywhere; on the most inhospitable shores, and under persecuting governments.

“Might not the tribes of Algeria be evangelised by those who carry the Gospel to the Chinese, the Tartars, the Indians, the savages of America, the Arabs of Syria, the negroes of Central Africa ?

“Why should politics interfere ? The State is not asked to put any burden, to lay any command upon the Arabs.

“Nothing is asked but liberty, but toleration for Catholic missionaries, that, without any assistance but that of truth and of God’s grace, they may try, to a very limited extent at first, to bring some knowledge of the Christian religion home to the Arabs of our African possessions. The French Government need do no more than not hinder these prudent endeavours; it would leave the Arabs free to retain or to abandon the Koran.

“This is all that the Bishop and the missionaries ask for, with the hope that this beginning of apostolic preaching, or rather of apostolic conversation in the language of the country, will produce none but happy fruits for the colony.”

The memorial, no doubt, still remains among the Minister’s papers; it will at least prove that our colony did not suffer through want of zeal on the part of the Bishop of Algiers and the missionaries.

F. de Ravignan’s zeal for the spread of the Gospel was frequently more fortunate. In the times of the Monarchy, the Republic, and the Empire alike, his reputation secured him influence in the highest quarters, and the addition of his name at the end of any petition generally insured success.

The Society, faithful to its apostolic traditions, several times in each year sent missionaries to the infidel countries of the extreme East, to the islands of the South Sea, and in every direction where the cross led the way. On these occasions, F. de Ravignan, as a matter of course, became an intercessor: in the name of civilisation he begged of the mother-country the charity of a free passage; and the answer, written, or at least subscribed, by the Minister's own hand, most commonly granted the favour asked, and added expressions of personal respect. Admiral Romain-Desfossés, when Minister of the Marine, never failed to add to his signature an assurance of his sincere gratitude. The Count de Rayneval, the French Ambassador at Rome, on granting a request of the same kind, congratulated himself on being in a position to do any favour to F. de Ravignan.

We must now describe F. de Ravignan's share in that famous question of liberty of teaching which was so well worth all that it cost. It had often been evaded, and was resolved by a Republic which by this act repaired the wrongs done by the Monarchy.

The new bill brought forward by the Count de Falloux, the Minister of Public Instruction, seemed at first a signal of dissension among the parties concerned. It was opposed both by the Left, as conceding too much to the Church, and by a considerable part of the Right, as not making sufficient concession. A schism broke out among the Catholics themselves. Each one judged in his own way: some were for pushing for everything that could be desired, others asked for no more than seemed to them attainable.

It must be acknowledged that the former found too many grounds of misgiving in past history, not to demand complete liberty from the government.

When men had been deceived a thousand times by promises which led to no result, who could blame them for taking precautions and demanding guarantees? Many of them saw reason to suspect some snare. Under the proposed law, they said, the monopoly would remain wearing the mask of liberty, and the new state of things would be worse than the old, on account of the imprudent support which had been given by the Catholics. Before, there was no liberty, but liberty was desired; now the hope of liberty is renounced: the chains which had been generously broken were being again assumed, and the Church was losing by one blow a part of its soldiers, and all the territory it had gained.

However plausible the grounds of these divided opinions may have been, the division was certainly very ill-timed at the decisive moment. A hundred voices might be counted on in the National Assembly as favourable to true liberty of teaching. All the other members of the majority, who had the name of the Party of Order, were composed of old Conservatives, who were incorrigible in their errors, and would have voted with the Mountain if the Catholics had not acted with them, or had demanded too much.

F. de Ravignan exerted himself in vain to restore union to the champions of religious liberty. While thus devoting himself to the common cause, he was made aware that he was an object of suspicion. A serious charge against him was brought before the Rev. Father-General of the Society, who was at the time in Belgium, and from whom, on September 10, 1849, he received the following letter:—

“REVEREND AND VERY DEAR FATHER,—I think that I ought not to leave you in ignorance of the complaints which have come before me of the active

part you take with regard to the new Education Bill. I know how much your position exposes you to be ill-judged and ill-understood, and that similar accusations have already more than once turned out destitute of foundation. I therefore do no more than send you a copy of the letter I have received. You will observe that it is not written by one of Ours. I will wait for your answer before sending any to the writer of the letter."

The letter was a formal charge, a regular indictment, which spoke both of persons and things in the strongest terms. Every wish was expressed to excuse F. de Ravignan's intentions, but there was denunciation of the wiles by which he was duped, the illusions to which he fell victim, the evils in which he was an accomplice. He was following blindly the lead of M. de Montalembert, of M. de Falloux, and especially of the Abbé Dupanloup; and was unintentionally promoting a schismatical Bill, causing a deplorable feud among Catholics, propagating fatal dissension in the bosom of the Society, and endangering the Church of France. The children of Voltaire were congratulating themselves on having for an ally a son of Loyola. And there was a final appeal to the firm and lofty wisdom of the General of the Society to bring back to order the soldier who had gone astray.

F. de Ravignan's answer was not long in coming: it bears date the 11th of September, and was consequently written under the influence of the first impression. It was this:—

"VERY REVEREND FATHER,—I hasten to answer the letter which your Paternity was good enough to write to me on the 8th of this month. I must first offer you my thanks for the communication it contains. My answer is simple.

1st, Neither at Paris, nor anywhere else, have I in any way endeavoured to influence my Brethren with regard to the new Bill; nor have I, beyond the limits of the Society, in dealing with Bishops, priests, or laymen, in any way acted, spoken, or written, with the purpose of defending or promoting the law in question. It was my duty to maintain, and I have maintained, the greatest reserve on the subject. I do not believe that a single action, a single word of mine can be adduced of a nature to bring on what is called dissension in the Society or in the Church. I felt the delicacy of my position, and I think that I faithfully followed the dictates of prudence and charity.

"2dly, I have a tender love and high esteem for M. de Falloux, M. de Montalembert, and the Abbé Dupanloup. We are, it is true, closely bound together, as closely, with regard to myself, as is possible, considering that I am a Religious. I look on these three men as devoted and enlightened champions of the Church, as true and devoted friends of the Society, and of this assuredly they have given proof. I feel my heart wounded when they are attacked. However, my tender and faithful friendship for these three illustrious men, and the confidence which they are good enough to manifest towards me under all circumstances, do not prevent my speaking the truth according to my conscience. In particular, during the sittings of the preparatory commission, which was organised at the office of the Minister of Public Instruction, and afterwards, and after the presentation of the Bill to the Assembly, I acted conjointly with F. Provincial in expressing views far from favourable to a scheme which was regarded as a necessary compromise.

"3dly, Acting in conjunction with the Provincial of Paris, and after receiving the observations sent

by F. Jordan, the Provincial of Lyons, I drew up a very short confidential note, which was communicated to some members of the committee named by the Chamber. If you will read this note, Very Reverend Father, you will see whether I am a blind partisan of the Bill. But I criticised it in a friendly spirit, and friendly voices have answered me decidedly, What you ask is impossible.

"4thly, I am far, very far from adopting the views and charges contained in some writings which I could name. To do so might, I verily believe, bring on dissensions in the Society and the Church. I abstain from sending to you, Very Reverend Father, what has been written to me on the subject by the most venerated Bishops, and by persons most worthy of esteem. I should dread the appearance of bringing counter-charges against those by whom I am accused. Only my excellent friend, Montalembert, said to me on one occasion, in a way that brought tears to my eyes: 'What, is this the way you treat me, me who have sacrificed myself for you?' Then he ceased speaking. I wrote to him afterwards, when quite collected, to comfort and reassure him as to our feelings. Would it be right to alienate such friends?

"5thly, The great influence exercised over me by the Abbé Dupanloup has often been made a ground of reproach. He is my intimate friend; I cling to and honour him: but in what points has he influenced me, especially so as to make me fail in my duty?

"6thly, No, I never declared openly against the Bill; I have thought it the better course to try to introduce amendments. It is not for me to tell what has been my success. I thought, and I still think, that in spite of the defective provisions of this Bill, when we take account of the extreme delicacy of the position of affairs, it will be possible

to establish free Colleges, and the Society will be able to do so.

“7thly, Since these miserable debates, I have heard and read, or come to the knowledge of much that gives me pain; but I have abstained from writing on the subject to your Paternity. From time to time I informed my Superior, who was on the spot in Paris, of all that concerned the Society or the Church, and with every one else I have observed the strictest silence. My friends, who are accused of apostasy and schism, have wished to spare me all painful explanations. The heart of Montalembert alone, and that only once, manifested itself.

“Be so good, Reverend Father, as to pardon me; bear with me, and believe me,” &c.

It was well that F. de Ravignan should be the subject of charges brought before his Superiors; it was even, I may say, necessary, that his strength and greatness might be the more manifest; but he was never condemned, and more than that, his conduct was never disavowed by the Society. Father-General wrote his answer on September 13:—

“I wish it was in my power to assuage in any degree the pain you suffer at seeing the false construction put upon your upright aims, and the persevering ascription to you of conduct which never entered your mind, and which would be wholly inconsistent with your views. We all of us require—and you, my dear Father, have more need of it than many others—to bear in mind that our labours must be carried on for God, and for God alone; and that if we rested our hopes only on the goods of this world, we should be the most miserable of men.

“I am now going to write my answer to the person who sent me the sort of memorial which I

laid before you. Shall I succeed in disabusing him? I beg God it may be so.

"If any attack is made on M. de Montalembert and our other generous friends, be so good as to express to them my deep sorrow, and to tell them that the Society is far from entertaining these sentiments; that for myself I know the amount of gratitude which is their due; and I hope by God's grace never to be wanting in compliance with what gratitude requires."

F. de Ravignan did not mention this trial to any one—not to his friends, nor even to his Brethren. "He had his troubles," exclaimed Mgr. Dupanloup eight years afterwards, in the discourse pronounced over his coffin; "he had his troubles; I heard of them . . . never from his mouth! One of the points that most command my admiration in this brave and gentle man, is his patience in trouble, and his silence in sorrow." We may add to this eloquent testimony another, that the heart of the generous son of St Ignatius never sought for itself any of the compassion which he was so ready to bestow on others; it was enough for him to have God in his confidence; and he followed the example of his Master, and, according to Tertullian's grand expression, he relished the pleasure of suffering in silence, and was comforted by receiving no comfort.

Moreover, he was far from giving up his endeavours out of discouragement or pique; but after the trial, no less than before, he took part in promoting the cause of religion with the same cheerfulness, passing through every change of fortune, through honours which he did not desire, and through criticism which he did not fear, his heart free and his course unaltered. The reason is, that he looked to something higher than personal interest in his work, and that he put off to eternity the enjoyment of his recompense.

After tasting the injustice of some of his friends, F. de Ravignan had to contend with the forwardness of some of his Brethren. It was important that at the moment all should act together; any false step, any imprudent measure, gave strength to the adversary, who turned everything into a weapon. But while this point was important, it was also difficult; a remote object does not look the same as one near at hand, and it is not always easy to hear at a distance.

While Paris was still discussing the measure, the rest of France began to act upon it. Some Jesuits, in compliance with the wish of a whole town, were ready to take the liberty which was not yet granted. When F. de Ravignan heard of this imprudent enterprise, he deemed it his duty to use his influence in opposition to the impatience of his Brethren. As the Provincial of Paris was at a distance, and the business appeared urgent, he himself wrote to them without delay, not in any official character, but with all the precautions suggested by prudence, and in the conciliatory tone required by charity.

His letter bears date September 13, 1849, the very day he had the comfort of receiving the fatherly letter of the General. What he wrote is a portion of history; we will give it in full:—

“I felt that it was right to take advice; accordingly I asked the Consultors of the Province, and some influential Fathers who were in Paris, to have the kindness to give me their opinions. Our little consultation led to some result and unanimous agreement. Allow me to explain to you our opinion.

“I should do right at once to inform M. de Falloux of your holy desires, and the plans suggested by your zeal. He is, I assure you, a true friend of ours. He is going to make a distinct declaration in his place in the Assembly that the

Bill was framed with the express intention that the Jesuits might be free to have Colleges in France. He deserves our confidence and respect, believe me. But on this very account, considering the precariousness, delicacy, difficulty of his position, how can we, before any new law has taken away the old impediments, how can we in prudence compromise him, expose him to attacks of still greater violence on our account, and make men say, shout, yell, that he is opening the doors of the Colleges before the passing of any solemn enactment?

“While everything is still under discussion, while an accident may ruin and compromise everything for an indefinite period, is it good for our cause, is it wise, is it the conduct due to our devoted friends and champions, that at the outset we should set ourselves in direct opposition to the University while all its tyrannical privileges are still in being?

“What answer, then, would you have us give? What answer could M. Falloux make in his place? What would become of liberty of teaching for the Church and the Society? Who can foresee the consequences? We clearly must ask for what is prudent, not for all that is desirable.

“In this position, the answer given to all offers of Colleges and Bishops’ Schools which have been made to us in Paris has been, Wait for the law. I believe also that the wish of the Bishops regarding our affairs would be the same.

“I venture, then, in the names of our blessed Father, and of our Lord and Master, to beseech you to think of this. My convictions and my motives are very imperfectly expressed; but your wisdom will assign them their true value. I believe myself to love the Society and the Church; I would give my life for their glory and their liberty; I would shun all that could put them in peril. With this sole end in view for the advancement of

the very cause to which you have so boldly devoted yourselves, I have thought that I might venture to lay before you these remarks; you will judge how far they deserve attention.

"For this reason I have not seen M. de Falloux, nor any other person, except the Fathers, who had the best right to form an opinion upon the subject. You will easily understand that I am not ignorant of all that is ascribed to me, and ascribed falsely. I accept all these charges; my conscience testifies that I am in the right in telling you of all our doubts and fears."

At length, after endless skirmishings, the law passed, whereby the Republic granted, if not equality, at least liberty of education. The result was due to the courage of some and the skill of others. It is well known that the statesman who brought about our proscription in 1845 had a large share in the vote of 1849. F. de Ravignan determined to give a sign of his gratitude, and left his card for M. Thiers, who promptly returned the compliment.

The Catholics forgot their recent differences, and hastened to take advantage of the law; their only struggle now was their emulation in working in the new field of liberty. A beginning was made by the formation at Paris of a Committee of Free Education, composed of the four Archbishops and Bishops who were chosen members of the Superior Council of Public Instruction, of priests, statesmen, and members of the Assembly, Catholic members of the Institute, lawyers, and writers of distinction.

At this interesting and important crisis, and with a full sense of the needs of the future, it was proposed to assist the establishment and development of free schools, both secondary and primary; there was no thought of taking up an attitude of hostility to the state education, of opposing of set purpose either the Superior Council or the author-

ities to whom the instruction was confided. The prospectus, drawn up by F. de Ravignan, and sent to all the Bishops of France, contained the following expressions: "Our intention is simply and sincerely to support, advance, and defend, if need arise, freedom of instruction, following the course which the new law has at length laid open to our wishes and our endeavours."

It is impossible to form a conception of the number of letters which F. de Ravignan received and wrote in connexion with this Committee, of all the documents which were brought before him, and the countless papers which he had to draw up. A thousand details crowded in on him together; every needful formality, every local question, every personal difficulty passed through his hands.

Divine Providence had constituted him protector of the cradle of our new-born Colleges. We cannot enter into the detail of the services for which they stand indebted to him, and we must be content with adducing two cases only in which he gave them effectual assistance.

A College of the Society had been opened at Metz, under disadvantageous circumstances with respect to its position; notwithstanding the great favour with which it was received, it was condemned never to have any great increase; it wanted air and room. The project was conceived of removing it to the old abbey of St Clement, the vast buildings of which belonged to the state. They were appropriated to the use of the military engineering department, and the ancient and magnificent church had been turned into a storehouse for straw; but, although the buildings were much better fitted for the purposes of a religious establishment, there seemed to be such difficulties in the way of procuring the transfer of them that there was scarcely room for hope. F. de Ravignan men-

tioned the matter to the Minister of War, caused it to be mentioned to the Emperor, obtained the order, and triumphed over the countless difficulties met with in the offices. It is due, then, to him that our College at Metz was removed to St Clement's, from which change of place sprung much of its increase and prosperity.

We must anticipate a little, to mention the interposition of F. de Ravignan in favour of our College at St Etienne. A bust of the Emperor had been broken by one of the scholars, and the Superior thought it prudent to allow this misconduct to remain unpunished for fear of provoking a dangerous outbreak. He was wrong in his prudential calculation. For the circumstance was laid hold of by ill-will ; the bad behaviour of a scholar was turned into a conspiracy, and information was speedily sent to the authorities, who, being misled as to the circumstances of the case, suppressed the establishment. It was a misfortune, but it was also a threat : the blow which now struck one house might hereafter destroy all. It might be expected that informations to our prejudice would be sent in thick as hail. Subordinates are always to be found on the look-out for opportunities of displaying their vigilance in their department and their fidelity to their employers, who are as eager to discover new grounds of complaint as others are for pieces of good fortune ; and those who wish it can always find new grounds of complaint.

On January 1, 1854, F. de Ravignan wrote to the Princess Mary : " We are in great trouble just now : the Emperor has decreed the closing of our College of St Michael at Saint-Etienne. Some six months ago some insignificant but unfortunate circumstances occurred ; tardy information was given by a person who had been dismissed from the College, the occurrence was magnified to an

enormous extent, and the College has been closed. I have asked for an audience with the Emperor, in order that, if he grant it me, I may make a frank, open explanation to dispel all bad impressions." He was received some days after at the Tuileries for a private audience. What passed? Nothing mysterious, we may be assured. In fact there will be no indiscretion in taking the whole world into confidence, by laying before them the full report of the interview; I have found it in F. de Ravignan's handwriting:—

THE EMPEROR. "I beg your pardon for having kept you waiting. I am very glad to see you are looking so well. I have heard you preach. You have been unwell. How are you?"

His Majesty's tone and manner were kind and polite. After my answer to his compliments, in which I contrived to mention that I had given up preaching, I added:—

"Sire, I have come here almost as if to be on my trial. I beg your Majesty's permission to explain the true course of the circumstances which have excited displeasure against the College of Saint-Etienne."

THE EMPEROR. "Yes, certainly."

I explained what had happened; I fully acknowledged the imprudence that had been committed, but I denied any guilty intention.

THE EMPEROR. "In this case the circumstances are much softened. They were not brought before me in that form. I am sorry that I was obliged to use severity. . . . But besides these circumstances, and in the circumstances themselves, there were indications of the tendency, of the direction, followed in the teaching at your Colleges,—a spirit of opposition to the Government."

The Emperor's expression was very moderate, and even cold.

F. DE RAVIGNAN. "Your Majesty will believe me : at least it will be allowed that as priests, as religious, we have a conscience." . . .

(The Emperor signified his approval.)

"Well, by our rule, by our duty to God and to men, we are strangers to politics, to all party spirit. We are adapted to all places and to all forms of government, and it is our duty to forbid any acts which display a spirit of opposition in politics. We preach the Gospel, impart the spirit of Christianity to our scholars in the same way as to all the faithful : we try to make this spirit dominant, and that is all.

"Circumstances cause a great number of Legitimist families to intrust their children to us and to apply to us. . . . The reason of this is, that these families are in general the most religious."

(The Emperor signified his approval.)

"But in giving spiritual direction and instruction, our duty, our rule, obedience, the express wishes of our Superiors, all compel us to keep aloof from party spirit and all political business. . . .

"We are thankful for the liberty, the protection, granted to religion."

THE EMPEROR. "Well, I will allow myself a question. [What he said amounted to this, *I will allow myself.*] How is it that since the time of Henry IV. you have always excited dislike?"

F. DE RAVIGNAN. "Sire, this admits of only partial explanation, for there are some things which cannot be explained. We were brought into existence to resist the Reformation. Both under the reign of Henry IV. and before and after it, the spirit of Protestantism has abhorred the Jesuits.

"There has also always been, and there is still, in existence, and there always will be, a political, parliamentary, Gallican spirit, in opposition to the Roman Church. We are regarded as Ultramontane, as very Roman, and it is true. We think that obedience to authority is the principle to be maintained in the Church as well as in the state. There is in the Church a sovereign authority to which we profess thorough devotion and perfect submission. . . .

"Then there have been Jesuits who have occupied positions of influence, and jealousy is sure to spring up.

"And, finally, we do not deny that sometimes there have been, and are, faults on the part of individual Jesuits.

"Really I should be very glad if men would give us the character we deserve of being bunglers."

THE EMPEROR, (laughing.) "This is not the character you have got."

F. DE RAVIGNAN. "As your Majesty allows me to speak openly and with freedom." . . .

THE EMPEROR. "Yes."

F. DE RAVIGNAN. "I will say that we earnestly ask to be heard before we are struck; that if any charge is brought forward, your Majesty will be good enough to give us information."

THE EMPEROR. "Certainly; I will do so."

F. DE RAVIGNAN. "If any member of our body has been guilty, he shall be punished; dismissed, if necessary."

At this point I defended the Rector of St Michael's from the charge of wrong intention.

THE EMPEROR. "I have been told that two members of your Society have preached up the revolt of the poor against the rich."

F. DE RAVIGNAN. "Sire, I have heard nothing

of it, but I venture to assert it is false. . . . If your Majesty would furnish me with the names and the grounds of the charge, our Superiors would make inquiries, and I would report the result to your Majesty ; I should wish the report to be made to yourself."

THE EMPEROR. "Very well, I will have the grounds of the charge sent to you. You may address your answer to me, putting your name on the cover ; write that it is for me alone, and apply to the officer of the staff on duty."

In a letter addressed to the Princess Mary, F. de Ravignan gave an account of this interview : "The Emperor received me very kindly, and listened with attention. As to the College, all is over : it is empty, and the Emperor did not seem inclined to retrace his steps. But I see reason to have the best hopes for the future. I asked him earnestly to inform us and hear our defence before punishing us ; he gave me the promise, and explained to me how I could make sure that my representations should come to the hands of himself alone. We spoke a little of you. On the whole, I was very well satisfied on leaving the audience, and grateful for the Emperor's kind reception of me. I believe that the remembrance of you had the happiest influence."

The Emperor, in compliance with his promise, sent F. de Ravignan the particulars of the new charge to which he had alluded. Hitherto the Jesuits had been blamed for the Legitimist influence exercised in their Colleges ; now they were accused of teaching Socialist doctrines on the missions. F. de Ravignan was soon in a position to send his answer, and following the course which had been pointed out to him, he took care that his

reply should come under the Emperor's eyes ; it contained the most explicit denial by the priests involved, and the most formal and clear attestations by the Curé of the parish and the Bishop of the diocese. The report of the latter was closed by the following expressions : " They preached the Gospel like true and faithful Apostles. How can we wonder ? among us, as in the time of our Lord, there are Jews and Samaritans who murmur. *But the Samaritans murmured.*" As to the informer, his strong wish to make himself a name by hostility to the Jesuits had led him, in a moment of inattention, into the blunder of ascribing to the preachers the objections which they were answering.

The part taken by F. de Ravignan was not without effect for the benefit of the College of Saint-Etienne. The Emperor saw the force of the explanation which had established the true state of the case. Only one step more was needed to give the Government the opportunity of retracing its steps ; and the favour was immediately granted on its being applied for by a deputation of respectable persons who had been able to observe the conduct of the Jesuits in the College implicated. The following letter will show us the happy close of the affair :—

" SIRE,—We wish to fulfil the duty of gratitude. The deputies from the town of Saint-Etienne have told us how kindly your Majesty received their application. The solemn promise that the College of St Michael shall be again opened fills us with joy, and we offer you, Sire, our most heartfelt thanks.

" The blow which struck us caused the most lively grief and concern, considering the sacred

interests to which our lives are devoted. Your Majesty restores us courage and confidence. Priests and religious as we are, we cannot, we must not fail to set an example of respect and submission to the Government and the laws. Such is our rule, such is our spirit, according to which we shall always shape our conduct. This, Sire, I ask you to believe.—I am, with the deepest respect, &c.

“X. DE RAVIGNAN.”





CHAPTER XXI.

SICKNESS IN 1852.

Anxiety and Alarm of the Physicians—Self-devotion of Sœur Rosalie—Dr Récamier's Course of Treatment—F. de Ravignan Convalescent at Versailles—Death of Marshal Exelmans—Spiritual Exercises followed by Internal Trials—Journey to Angers—Return to Paris and Sudden Recovery.



SICKNESS had left F. de Ravignan with many infirmities, which his ceaseless labours increased. He often had pain as if his larynx were on fire, and almost continually as if he were afflicted with stone. His delicate constitution had become exceedingly sensitive, and felt every variation of temperature; yet he never said a word about any of his sufferings, and they never could have been guessed from his calm and cheerful countenance. Only, when his state was worse than ordinary, he shut himself up in solitude and darkness; then after some days passed without sleep and in attention to his health, he would be seen to come forth again stronger and more active than before, as though his character had been tempered anew in the bitter waters of suffering. During one of these crises of more than usual severity, sciatica came on in addition to his nausea, and the extreme sensibility of the patient's

constitution caused him to suffer almost as much from the prescriptions of the physicians as from the disease.

At last, in the course of February 1852, neuralgia suddenly came on, and an attack of the most acute nature became permanent; all the symptoms which are commonly found to accompany it showed themselves with a severity and obstinacy wholly unwonted. Both sleep and appetite altogether deserted the patient, and for several weeks he remained deprived of the benefit of these two natural restoratives. He must have died of starvation, if after several useless attempts, some one had not thought of trying a little water just coloured with milk. All the resources of art were lavished upon him; two eminent physicians, M. Récamier and M. Cruveilhier, visited him two or three times a day; but with all their genius and all their zeal they were at a loss how to treat a disease which eluded their search. Fears began to be entertained of a fatal result.

The alarm which was universally felt proved what a place F. de Ravignan held in the public mind. People came in troops to the Rue de Sèvres, to learn something of his state, and to leave their names; the Queen Marie-Amélie and the Princesses of Orleans sent from their residence at Claremont to ask for accounts of the invalid; and the Sovereign Pontiff was good enough to give and to sign with his own hand the permission for Mass to be said in a room adjoining that in which the sick man lay.

Before the month of February had expired, and while the disease was still increasing in violence, a person who lived in habitual union with our Lord heard the following words spoken by Him in her soul: "This is a trial sent in mercy and love. The prayers which will be offered for F. de Ravig-

nan will touch My Heart. For the advantage of souls, I will leave him some years longer on earth, and during these years you must bear with suffering. His soul will be more closely united with Mine, his charity will glow more brightly, he will give comfort and strength to souls. In pain, his own soul will be purified." I do not vouch for this communication from heaven, on which the reader must set whatever value he thinks fit ; but I will call attention to a very extraordinary circumstance. The person who believed that she heard these words, and who wrote them down that very moment, added that she understood that the number of the " some years " promised to F. de Ravignan was already fixed, and would be limited to six. Now at the beginning of the memorandum, which has been in my possession from that time to the present, we read the date, February 26, 1852 ; and after six years, completed on that very day, on February 26, 1858, F. de Ravignan departed this life.

It will be remembered that Mme. Albert de la Ferronnays devoted herself to death in 1846 to prolong F. de Ravignan's apostolic career, and that Heaven was pleased to accept the exchange. In the course of the sickness of 1852 something similar occurred. The well-known Sœur Rosalie, the great friend and benefactress of the Society of Jesus, who was living in the little street called the Rue de l'Epée-de-Bois in the Quartier Saint-Marceau, one day let fall the following words on rising from prayer : " After considering in God's presence what a loss the death of this excellent preacher of the faith would be to France, and especially to the young, I have offered God the sacrifice of my own life, that He may be pleased to prolong the days of this holy man." It was understood that she was speaking of F. de Ravig-

nan ; and when some one said to her, jokingly, " 'Take care lest God should take you at your word,' " " I should be too happy," she answered ; "but I fear that I am found too light in God's balance, unprofitable servant as I am ; no more than a weak little gleaner in the Householder's field, in comparison with this great evangelical labourer." She showed herself full of feeling as she said these words.

When this heroic act was told to F. de Ravignan, he was deeply touched, but at the same time filled with sorrow : for he longed for death, and feared to be again disappointed of his hope, and ransomed at the price of so noble a life. Some months afterwards, the very first time he was able to go out in a carriage, he ordered the coachman to drive to the little house, the scene of this act of devotedness, to acknowledge that he owed his returning health to his pious deliverer. He did in fact survive her ; and on the day of the burial of this revered daughter of St Vincent of Paul, F. de Ravignan was seen in the funeral procession, or rather in the midst of that immense gathering which passed through the broadest streets of the populous Quartier Saint-Marceau, and which marched beside the coffin in sorrow and recollection.

Meantime the disease, which had so long had a mysterious character, declared its nature in a most unexpected manner, and in a moment changed its course and symptoms. M. Récamier was never wanting in expedients : he had great learning ; but when learning failed him, he could invent and try new plans when others had given up all hope ; and he never acknowledged that medicine need yield except to death. He remembered Bièvres, and as in 1848, he again said, " Well, throw him into the water," and retiring to the Superior's room, he awaited the result of the operation. Suddenly

a messenger came to tell him that the patient felt suffocated as soon as he entered the bath. I seem still to have in my ears the good doctor's cry of sorrow, and to see his gesture of despair. He collected his thoughts, with his face buried in his hands, and then changing his mind, he exclaimed, "Very well, I am all the better pleased: there must be some effusion; but at least I know what is the matter. Now I am master of the disorder, and it is henceforth only a question of time." He hastened to the sick-room, used the stethoscope, and assured himself that his guess was correct. The effusion had almost reached its limit; only the upper part of one of the lungs could act any longer, and all the rest was immersed in fluid. The oppression was extreme, the voice gone, but the neuralgia had disappeared. Chronic disease succeeded the acute disorder.

The period of torture was followed by that of weariness, and it is difficult to say which demanded the greater patience. The water which filled the chest could be absorbed only by the action of the capillary vessels, which were starved by a course of diet: the liquid was to be drawn off by these inconceivably minute pumps, and little by little enter into the regular circulation. The only remedy, therefore, was by time and repose; art could do no more than allow nature to have her way.

That the effect of a purer air might hasten this tedious cure, the convalescent was sent from Paris to Versailles. The Baron de Ravignan acted as his brother's nurse, and chose a house in the Rue Saint Antoine, the quietest quarter of the city. In the beginning of the month of May, F. de Ravignan was able to be removed from the Infirmary in the Rue de Sèvres, where he had passed three months, and was taken to this retreat, where he was to reside for the same period.

During this interval we have no public incidents to tell of, but there is no want of private particulars. F. de Ravignan was forbidden by his physician to speak, but he was able to use his pen. We will give some remarks which occur in letters written at this time: "Everything here is as it should be; there is repose, and perfect solitude. . . . Solitude always has the same sweetness. I will not, however, refuse to act. What might almost make me uneasy is, that my soul for three months past has been constantly in peace, consolation, and joy. Let everything be according to the will of our Lord, and at the disposal of His Sacred Heart! I assure you that my soul has not been disturbed, even by a passing thought of weariness. Since my illness began, it has been once more proved that silence and solitude were, naturally speaking, my proper sphere: perhaps, too, it is an inclination sent by God. I give myself up to His holy will, to fix the time when I shall have to begin again to listen and to speak.

"In the light of grace, we may feel astonishment that man can cling to anything but to God and His known will. To suffer, to be cured, to rest, to labour, to live in consolation or under trial—what does all this matter so long as God himself directs all these things, and sends them to us? Really we cannot, or, at least, we ought not, to have any feeling but the holy and pure indifference which the love of God inspires. Let us be indifferent to everything, except to God alone, and the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus."

F. de Ravignan's love of solitude was accompanied by a taste for pious, familiar conversation. He lived at Versailles *incognito*, but the secret of his address was made known to some chosen friends. The Bishop of Orleans, the Count Molé, the Count de Montalembert, knew the road which led to his

retreat. He wrote constantly, almost every day, in the most affectionate terms, to one or other of his Brethren in the Rue de Sèvres.

At one time he would invite one of them to come and make his annual retreat in the Thebaid of Versailles: "It would be a great comfort to me," he wrote, "to see you, to be near you, and to listen when you were at liberty to speak. As to the fear you express of leaving me in silence for eight days, excuse my saying that I am surprised that you should talk or think of anything of the kind. My tastes, my desires, point more and more to the need of being silent; in silence I find my joy and my peace. I beg you then to consider nothing but your own convenience. I should be really sorry if I could for a moment suppose that in determining to come to Versailles you did not act with full and absolute freedom."

At another time he received the community as guests in his solitude, and would have it transformed into a villa. Only three or four Fathers came at a time to this brotherly meeting, lest a great number should embarrass the invalid who was their host, and his very limited household. But the host never thought the feast complete so long as a single one was wanting. We will give one of the applications he made to his Superior; it is pressing, and, at the same time, reserved, for even when he was trying to give pleasure, he took care not to cause annoyance.

"While I was writing to F. Minister this morning, a thought occurred to me which I decided not to express; I had some doubts. This evening I am pursued by the same thought; I will lay it before you, and ask as a favour that you will approve and act upon it.

"Come on Monday to Versailles with our Fathers from the Rue de Sèvres; why, for once, should you

not come all together to see the hermit in the Rue Saint-Antoine? With a little management we can easily find room for a dozen Fathers at table; and even if there were more of you we could contrive. I should be glad to have this meeting, if it would not be too great an inconvenience to our Fathers. We should dine together, and then every one would be at liberty. I undertake to make all the little preparations.

"Be so good as to send me an answer, Yes or No, in all simplicity and freedom."

About this time one of his Brethren in the Rue de Sèvres received a new appointment from Rome, and informed him of it in confidence; they were very soon to be separated. F. de Ravignan's reply was that of a friend and a religious; while he expressed the most affectionate sorrow at losing him, he was far from giving him any hint of a representation he made to F. General. His letter was as follows:—

"In the presence of our Lord, what words can we use, what thoughts can we entertain but *fiat*, with the utmost submission and resignation? God means you to bear a heavy cross. He will bear you in His Heart with tender love. Your soul has strength to devote itself and accept obedience in its fulness. And we, we remain with the baggage. Oh, my Father, take comfort; you have been deemed worthy to be sacrificed on your Master's cross. I say no more respecting what God wills of you: like you, I wish to submit.

"So we must be separated! I congratulate you on being set free from the burden of my worrying. How can you talk to me about pardon and thanks? This perversion of fact gave me great pain. My dear Father, I am nothing but a trouble and torment to all who come near me, and always find you patient, kind, and indulgent."

But while he wrote in these terms to his religious Brother, on whom Heaven called for a sacrifice, he wrote to F. General to a totally different effect. It was his duty to recommend obedience to the one; he was able to entreat the other to withdraw his command. Accordingly, in consequence of the reasons he adduced, the order was revoked; but so great was his discretion, that he never spoke to the person concerned of his intention on his behalf.

Towards the close of June the Baron de Ravignan was forced to leave Versailles, and his brother wrote to his Superior: "My brother is leaving me; he is going with his children to the South. I venture, therefore, to ask for the company of a Lay Brother at Versailles. Excuse the trouble I give you." A proposal was made to send him not only a Brother to attend upon him, but one of the Fathers to keep him company. His reply was full of humility and religious indifference: "F. Provincial is very good to think of a Father *Socius* for me. I shall be very happy whatever choice is made; and I beg your leave to decline naming any one by any choice of my own; for, in truth, I have no choice for one name more than another. I am only afraid that it will be a very painful requisition laid upon the Father that is sent here to keep me company. The sacrifice of a Lay Brother is enough to satisfy the Rule; I should have a *Socius*. There is no necessity for me to have a Father besides. You know very well that I am happy and contented in complete solitude. But judge for yourself; do not be influenced; really I shall be happy with whatever my Superiors shall appoint."

However, the fervent Religious sighed—it is his own expression—after the day which should restore him to community life in the Rue de Sèvres. His return to Paris was fixed, in the first instance,

for the end of July, but was hastened by a grievous calamity, the death of his brother-in-law, the Count Exelmans, Marshal of France, and Grand Chancellor of the Legion of Honour.

On the evening of July 21, the Marshal was riding out, accompanied only by his son, M. Maurice Exelmans, the Captain of the Imperial yacht, the *Reine Hortense*, and one of the Emperor's staff. On leaving his mansion, he took the road towards the Pavillon de Breteuil. In the middle of the Pont de Sèvres, the horse reared in consequence of the sudden approach of a carriage, ran away, and threw the rider. The Marshal fell with his head on the stones of the pavement: he was taken to the nearest adjoining house, and all through the night couriers were hastening in all directions carrying the news of the terrible accident, and summoning assistance. A carriage belonging to the Princess Mathilde drove as quickly as possible to Versailles to fetch F. de Ravignan. Let us allow him to speak himself, in a letter written on the following day, July 22, to his brother, who had already reached the South:—

“MY DEAR BROTHER,—A carriage came to Versailles for me this morning about two or three o'clock. Maurice sent me word that his father was in a most critical state, owing to a fall from his horse in the road close to the Pont de Sèvres. I got there, but it was too late. Our poor brother-in-law died in a tavern, at three o'clock in the morning. His skull was fractured: he lost consciousness, and never recovered it. O God! O God! A priest of Boulogne, near Paris, gave him Extreme Unction. Maurice was with his father; they had started together to go to the Pavillon de Breteuil.

“At half-past four I started for Paris, in company with the Minister of the Interior, who had hastened

to the spot, and who took me in his carriage as far as the Legion of Honour. I let my sister know, prepared her as well as I could, and then broke to her the fatal news. She wept a great deal, which did her good. But what a misery to think of! We see the need of being ready! Maurice has brought his father's body. We are here with my sister in the Marshal's room, close to his bed.

"I leave Versailles, and am coming to stay in Paris; you can guess why. Let us pray, my poor Brother—pray, and every day keep ourselves prepared."

This tragic death filled F. de Ravignan with great and lasting sorrow. The Marshal, who was struck as suddenly as a stroke of lightning, had not practised his religion. He had lived a glorious life, amid the din of arms and the struggles of politics. But what is all this to eternity? exclaimed F. de Ravignan. Yet he had a naturally religious soul. He had in a marked degree that character of a French soldier which has sympathy with religion and its duties, as with everything which reminds him of greatness, order, and devotedness: the example of a pious wife, and the frequent representations of his brother-in-law were gradually bringing him to practical belief: he had promised to make his confession, but he had not time. But, as F. de Ravignan had said with reference to the very similar catastrophe on the road to Neuilly, in some deaths there are hidden mysteries of mercy and acts of grace where the eye of man sees nothing but acts of justice. Sometimes, in the light of a last ray of grace, God makes Himself known to souls whose greatest misfortune was not to have known Him; and the last sigh is understood by Him who fathoms the hearts of men, and may be a cry which calls down pardon.

On the very day of the Marshal's death, the person whose mysterious communications we have already mentioned thought she heard an interior voice, saying, "Who knows the extent of My mercy? Does man know the depth of the sea, and the water which is therein? Much is pardoned to souls whose ignorance has been great." This communication from heaven was reported to F. de Ravignan, who would not vouch for its reality, but used it to afford comfort to his sister.

He went into retreat at the beginning of August, in order to seek to learn the will of God regarding his future, which was still so uncertain, and to prepare his own will for every event. "My wish," he said, "is to be entirely in God's hands." On the Assumption he thus described the state of his soul under the influence of grace: "This morning I came out of my retreat, and I am conscious that the 'Our Father,' the 'Thy will be done,' are the expression and sense of my feelings, and of the graces which God has given to His unworthy servant. On the three or four earlier days of my retreat, I prayed and hoped for the restoration of my strength; no doubt I was over-anxious for it. My disposition respecting it underwent a sudden change, and I felt myself carried away into a true indifference, so as to accept whatever the Heart of our Lord shall give, and desire nothing but the fulfilment of His will. In this disposition I remained, and still am, at least in the higher part of my soul.

"Total denial of self-will, immolation, entire submission to the will of God. Really, what can we think of or wish but what God wishes? The cross, suffering; darkness, light; toil, inaction; temptation, peace: 'Thy will be done.' O God, may Thy will be done, and be blessed a thousand times in every point!

“Such was my retreat, at least in its result, which I hope to keep in mind, and to make bear fruit. With all my heart I desire whatever God desires. My health is in the same state as before my retreat. The larynx is still affected, and it seems torn and set on fire if I speak even a short sentence. M. Cruveilhier believes the injury incurable.

However, I will let you know; some portions of my retreat were full of pain. I felt dread of a thoroughly useless life; but grace has prevailed; I have accepted all with joy, though at the same time I pray for recovery so far as to be able to labour for the salvation of souls.”

Thus we see the son of St Ignatius left Manresa ready for all that the future might bring, armed for every struggle. Had he any anticipation beforehand of the new and severe trials which awaited him? At least, God knew of them before, and prepared the way, by giving determined courage. Dating from his retreat in 1852, I have tried to find a solitary day of calm in this life, in which are seen the tracks of so many interior tempests, and I have been unsuccessful. As soon as his illness ceased, he began to feel these sorrows of the Saints; and when pain left his body, it attacked his soul. As we shall hereafter devote a special chapter to the terrible course in which he was entering, we shall at present speak only of those particulars which do not admit of separation from our narrative.

As early as August 19, four days only after his retreat, F. de Ravignan made the avowal of what he suffered: “Sorrow has come to weigh me down which, during the five months of my sickness and convalescence, I never experienced. I have tasted something of the suffering of anguish and tempests. Blessed be God in all! I wait and pray. After all, if God would have me mute and useless,

I certainly must submit, and He will supply me with the needful grace.

"I will tell you all: since my retreat my soul has been seized by exceedingly great pains. The feeling of my uselessness, of my prolonged inaction, came upon me with an altogether unusual force and effect. I have not been able yet, nor can I now, and yet I see I must do nothing but abandon and resign myself to all. In the highest part of my soul, the region of sternness, I accept all with tranquillity. However, I beg you not to think too much of all this. Let us suffer and be devoted! If the strength to work is given us, let us work! We shall die some day. How many different deaths we shall go through before that day!"

We here learn the cause of his desolation. His first wish, above all others, was to die; but if he were doomed to live, his wish was to work, and inactivity seemed to him the hardest of trials. Yet he must endure this trial, in the preparation of his heart at least, and prepare himself for doing nothing while labourers were wanting to the harvest. He was called on to mortify all the excessive, and perhaps natural, element still existing in a desire which in itself was excellent, and to learn at length that the greatest glory that man can give the Lord is to do His will. After all, God has no need to be served by our arms, but the sacrifice of our hearts is His right.

Instead of the trial passing away, it continued for a time, which seemed very long. It was a state of impotence, in which the palsy of mind was greater than of body; and the over-impatient will remained enthralled by a humiliating and painful incapacity.

"You are quite right," he said to one of his Brethren; "it would seem natural, necessary to employ my perfect solitude usefully in some seri-

ous employment. I have prayed earnestly with this view—I have applied to my Superior; but I have received no inspiration, either from grace or from obedience, to undertake any particular work. Nothing particular suggests itself, and I cannot invent nor do anything which would be profitable to souls. I made an attempt to write: it was worse than feeble. However, I put together a few pages every day on the Trials of the Interior. I do not know what they will turn out.

“I am reduced to perfect incapacity, shut up within walls, . . . calm in the depth of my soul, but sorry to be unable to do anything, happy to be thus humiliated.

“For thirteen hours every day my solitude is perfect and unbroken. Yet the time is never heavy on my hands; it gets filled one way or other. If only I could profit by it!

“Joy and bitter sorrow, peace and torment, these go together in our Lord’s service. Let us rejoice; we shall some day be taken to the bosom of God.

“I am a poor beggar, asking for work and service, in order to gain the spiritual bread of souls.”

In the sharpest period of F. de Ravignan’s trials, he did not trouble others with what he suffered, but he forgot himself to give them comfort, following the example of his Master at Calvary. Scarcely could any one pay any attention to what he suffered without his feeling less relief of his own pains than sorrow at what the other endured on his account; he almost felt remorse for the compassion to which he gave rise in others.

“I reproach myself for having spoken to you of my miseries, although I do not repent. Is it right that I should take up both your time and my own in this way, with the trials and pains it has pleased our good Master to send me, in what is really a very small degree? Excuse me. I am deeply

touched by your devoted zeal for my soul, which fills me, to an extent I cannot express, with the most lively gratitude to God. And I, poor miserable tool, what good am I doing for you, or what have I done or can I do? How thankful I am to our Lord that He attaches to my feeble words a grace that gives you comfort! I might well be dismayed when I think of my miseries, but I am thoroughly happy."

The Religious, in all his trials, was readier to acknowledge his faults than to disclose his sufferings. Thus he would say: "I give way to impatience much more frequently than you, and rebel against afflictions which bear no comparison to yours. But in my soul I feel lively and deep-seated sorrow for these external effects of impulse. Much in these movements is involuntary; but I ought to make some advance towards becoming their master. With the aid of grace it can be done; and what we can do, it is our duty to do. Patience, patience!"

This humble confession recalls to my mind an occurrence which shows that F. de Ravignan knew as well how to repair as to acknowledge what he did wrong. Once, in the house, his will allowed impulse to be beforehand, and the good Father was surprised into an open act of impatience. It was a happy fault, and nobly avenged. I could wish that such falls were common, provided they were followed by the like recovery. I will relate the circumstances of this imperfection, which humility wept over as a crime; its occasion was the merest trifle.

The community of the Rue de Sèvres was to dine at the little villa which the kindness of the Bishop of Versailles put for a time at their disposal. The Superior urged F. de Ravignan to accompany his Brethren. At first he declined the

invitation with thanks, but afterwards he yielded to the expression of a simple wish which he regarded as an order. The day was far from fine, it was damp and cold, and the convalescent did not feel so well as usual. After the dinner, the Superior joined him, and they took a stroll together. He seemed downcast and in pain; his face was gloomy and sullen; suddenly he allowed a first movement to escape him like a spark leaping out at the moment of contact; he complained of the imprudence which had been committed. He was wrong in being too sensitive—perhaps the Superior was wrong in being too susceptible. “Why, Father,” was the answer, “is it just to blame me for what could not be foreseen? I did what I thought was best. However, a little journey would be a useful change for you. At Angers, for example, you would find the air softer than in Paris.” F. de Ravignan had now no thought but for repentance and self-accusation. By the leave of F. Provincial, he left Paris for Angers; and on reaching that place, he wrote the following letter, which is full of the deepest humility. It will serve to show us how severely holy men judge of themselves:—

“You will easily understand that one only thought, one only feeling, has filled my heart and soul since I left Paris, as well as before, and this is, boundless and deep regret for my extraordinary behaviour towards you. I beg God to grant me the favour, and I ask you to join your prayers with mine, that I may, *my whole life through*, retain this continual sorrow, *continuus dolor cordi meo*; that my life may be spent in grief and repentance, with the constant remembrance of my unworthy conduct towards the best of Fathers. There is nothing just now to give me trouble or disturbance; my soul seems to respond to the calm of this house; and with this interior tranquillity, the

free gift of God, my heart and my eyes are full of tears.

"Pardon me, pardon! But no, do not pardon. Drive me from your heart, from your house, and ask the just Judge that I may suffer much and die.

"I think that God has visited me in His justice and mercy. On the road my nausea returned: it increased to the greatest intensity possible. But the sickness at my heart was greater still. Besides, there was a sort of cold came on. This morning all these symptoms have abated. I feared I should not be able to write: I wanted to do so so much! The little I have suffered has given me some small consolation."

The character of the Superior's answer may be readily guessed; but the struggle was unequal: in the field of humility F. de Ravignan was never overcome. He immediately wrote a fresh letter:—

"Your prompt answer furnished me with a new proof of your inexhaustible kindness. In that letter your great charity spoke its own language, with all its usual good-will and gentleness. My soul has been deeply affected. I offer you from my heart my gratitude, respect, devotedness, and my immense, abiding regret.

"You bid me to give up accusing myself, and you exercise a humility which fills me with confusion. What can I say or do to recompense you, by the comfort I give, for the satisfaction and calm of which I have robbed you? Go away? I have done so in compliance with your advice. But while I thank you for the course you have taken, for the great charity which always marks your plans, I am very much grieved to think that you have thought this measure necessary. Blessed be God for this at least, that He has connected some assurance of tranquillity for you with my sacrifice and obedience. The best part of my heart—no,

there is no good in it ; but I may say the sincerest part, that which is most alive to whatever affects you—joins with your Angel Guardian in congratulation on the well-earned repose which my leaving has restored to your soul and to your house.

“ You may be satisfied that this feeling is free from any admixture of bitterness. You enjoy repose ; I am glad of it, and I am no longer there to disturb you by my incredible deficiencies. Excuse me, and do not hesitate to indulge the thought. Any course adopted with regard to me which shall set you free from trouble, or even from the mere dread of trouble, I shall find pleasing and acceptable. After all, places are nothing to me, persons and all external things little more.

“ I trust that my journey and stay here will fulfil your expectations, and secure the result which your zeal alone intended. I deserve severe treatment by Providence, and to experience the rigour of divine justice ; here, as at Paris, it is displayed in a state of suffering difficult to bear.

“ But why speak of this ?—it is quite useless.”

Far from keeping F. de Ravignan away, there was no thought but of getting him back to Paris in a fortnight. His stay in Angers had been far from beneficial ; it was a dry, biting season, and this brought on, in addition to the irritation of the larynx, pain in the chest, with cough and spitting of blood.

We will give his last letter dated from Angers ; it discloses the character of the Religious in all his simple obedience and generous affection. His protestations had given some relief to his heart, which began to pour itself out as before.

“ I thought it proper to write to Father Provincial ; I had asked his leave for this journey to Angers, and after prayer it seemed best to ask his leave to return to Paris, provided you approve.

"I ask also for a defence against the onslaughts made by your charity and M. Cruveilhier. My health and my mind will be all the better if I see a few visitors in my room, and hear a few Confessions.

"Two lines coming from your heart will be enough to let me know F. Provincial's intentions regarding my two requests. On both points I give up entirely to the care of my Superiors.

"If God brings me back to your house, my duty will, I know, be to enter faithfully on the path in relation to you which grace has marked out. May I be able to repair the past, and never again cause you pain, the very remembrance of which pierces me with sorrow. I had written thus far, my dear and revered Father, when I received your letter. I was on the look out for it; and in the packet, which I am sorry to say I get every day, I have sought with respectful love for your dear writing. Yes, Father, I will come back as soon as possible, happy to throw myself at your feet and into your arms.

"Accept from the most unworthy and guilty of your children the heartfelt expression of his repentance, his respect, and his boundless confidence."

Accordingly, F. de Ravignan returned to Paris on the 20th of October 1852, with the wish to resume once more some of the duties of the sacred ministry, little thinking that Heaven still had much work in store for him for the salvation of souls. "If I live in my room with the true spirit by which I ought to be guided," he said on returning, "it may be a pulpit from which I can preach continually. May I succeed in doing no injury to the souls which God shall send me."

Scarcely had the invalid reached Paris, when the person who had already twice let him know com-

munications received by her from heaven, sent him some fresh words which she believed that she had heard interiorly while conversing with our Lord : " It is not enough that F. de Ravignan prays for health out of obedience. Let him remember all the engagements he has formed with Me. Has he not asked Me that he may continue to suffer and labour in reparation ? Let him renew his promises, and beg Me to preserve him for My service."

The person who professed to have been charged with this message, advised him to begin a novena to obtain his cure ; she went so far as to mention the prayer which she believed to have been suggested from on high.

The Religious found a surer oracle in the decisions of holy obedience ; he placed himself under its protection, that he might walk without risk in the paths of Christian prudence. He answered accordingly, on October 22 :—" I want to tell you before the day is over, that my Superior, by virtue of his authority over me, gives his approval, and wishes this novena to be made, and prayer said from this day to the 1st of November. He will offer Mass, and I will do so every day for the recovery which you desire."

On the conclusion of the Novena, the Feast of All Saints, he was able to send word of his recovery. " I have just been saying a Mass of thanksgiving. My voice is really restored. Blessed be the Lord for it ! I am thoroughly penetrated with a deep feeling of confusion and gratitude whenever I think of the designs of Providence. Who am I ?

" You would wish to know my real state. Well, I am cured, and cannot entertain a doubt of it. This change in my voice was brought about little by little during the Novena.

" My Superior feels as sure that the result has been attained as I myself. He thinks, in pursuance

of a suggestion I made to him, that I can and *ought* to give a short instruction to-day to the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Conflans. I am very glad of it. It was not without emotion that I felt myself talking of God after nine months of silence. My soul received a certain degree of peace.

“What shall I say or do? I know not how to say or do anything! Oh, Sacred Heart of Jesus! Oh, blessed Mary, Mother of Sorrows, help me. Beg Jesus, crucified and sacrificed through love, that at length I may imitate Him! Oh, that I may succeed in helping souls!

“We agree, Father Superior and myself, to say nothing, absolutely nothing, about the change which has taken place in my health. I have warned M. Cruveilhier, and I shall very quietly resume my employments in the sacred ministry.

“All our strength and assurance are in obedience. Such is God’s plan. May we love this virtue more and more; it is precious above all others!”





CHAPTER XXII.

DEATH OF F. ROOTHAAN.

F. Roothaan recommends F. de Ravignan to write his Apology for Clement XIII. and Clement XIV.—His Death—F. de Ravignan goes to Rome for the Election of his Successor.



THE period of six years which followed F. de Ravignan's sickness in 1852, bears much resemblance to the period of six years by which it was preceded. This has made it necessary, for the avoidance of repetition, to relate, in the first period, many incidents of the sacred ministry, which, by their date, belong to the second. Nothing, therefore, now remains to be done but to mention some particular occurrences, which the order of matter, no less than that of time, obliges us to treat separately, and under their own date.

Scarcely a month after his cure, F. de Ravignan was at his table, pen in hand, labouring at the task in which he took no interest, with the same earnestness as he would have bestowed on the most agreeable labour. He preferred preaching or hearing Confessions to composing books, and he was never tired of repeating that he did not know how to write ; but, on the other hand, he knew so

well how to obey, that through the force of obedience, he became an author as well as orator.

The work, bearing the title *Clement XIII. and Clement XIV.*, which he took in hand, sprang from an idea of F. Roothaan's, an idea well worthy to be conceived in the heart of the Father and executed by the hand of the Son. It was the province of the Society, to use the expression of Count Beugnot, to vindicate the memories of these two Sovereign Pontiffs from the insults, or the flattery, more baneful than insult, of which they have been recently the objects. F. Roothaan was not allowed to see the completion of that rehabilitation which he had promoted; but we see that he gave one more proof how much he loved the Church; and F. de Ravignan was able to write on the opening page of his book these noble and touching words, which show us its origin, its spirit, and its purpose:—

“I obeyed, I am glad to say, the thought, full of charity, of one who is no longer among us. F. Roothaan, of pious memory, late General of the Society of Jesus, wrote to me not long before the cruel malady which took him away. F. Theiner's work—why should I conceal it?—caused him the deepest sorrow; he saw in it not only an attack on the Society of Jesus, but a weak defence, and even abandonment of the Holy See, and of Clement XIV. He let me know that he thought a better apology might be made for the Pontiff, by whom the Society was suppressed; and he communicated to me some remarks on the subject, which I treasured up, and keep as my Father's testament. With the help of these first suggestions, I began my work: it had but one purpose, and I seek in it one only merit—truth.”

F. Roothaan's letter, of which F. de Ravignan speaks, seems not only to shed glory on him that

wrote it and on him that received it, but it also appears to be of interest to all the world, and to deserve a place in history. We shall recognise in it a successor of St Ignatius, ready in the interests of the Church to fight in spite of risk and peril to the Society, declining to defend the honour of his Brethren at the expense of the honour of the Holy See, adoring the hand of Providence in the decree which suppressed his Order, and blessing the hand of the Vicar of Jesus Christ by which the decree was signed. This letter of F. Roothaan's was written at Rome in the course of December 1852; we give it at length:—

“REVEREND AND VERY DEAR FATHER,—I am going to speak to you of a work which I should be glad that you should undertake if the state of your health allowed. It is not without much hesitation that I propose it to you, from a fear that your well-known readiness to regard a mere expression of my wish as a formal order, should expose you to miscalculate your bodily strength. I begin, therefore, by recommending you, in the most pressing way, not to undertake this work if you think that it can put in jeopardy the yet imperfect restoration of your health.

“You are acquainted with F. Theiner's last work. It has given great dissatisfaction here. He had of course a praiseworthy intention of restoring the honour of the Vicar of Jesus Christ; but the course he has adopted is very unfortunate. We may put on one side the injustice done to the Jesuits in this book, for the sake of justifying the hostile governments, Portugal, France, Spain, &c.; but the fact is, a very poor defence is made of Clement XIV., and real injustice is done to his predecessors in the chair of St Peter. The author does more wrong to the Holy See than even to the Society. Now, the

Society exists for the defence of the Church and of the Holy See. Therefore wrongs done to the Church and to the Holy See ought to touch us more nearly than those which immediately affect the Society. It has occurred to me that a defence of Clement XIV., written by one of Ours, might be much stronger, and meet with better success. My plan is this :

“The violent conduct of the governments appears sufficiently from F. Theiner himself. It began towards the end of the pontificate of Benedict XIV., continued under Clement XIII., and reached its height on the death of this Pope ; and then in the conclave which elected Clement XIV. everything was carried to an incredible length, even to a threat of schism, of refusing to recognise any Pope that might be elected who should be indisposed to comply with the demands made for the destruction of the Society. Under these circumstances, I really do not see what any Pope could have done, even had it been Marcellus II., or Gregory XIII., or any other, however kindly disposed towards the Jesuits, especially seeing how deplorable have been the results of the Anglican schism. It has not been shown that any promise was made in the Conclave that elected Clement XIV. ; on the contrary, all the Cardinals, even those most opposed to the Society, had a horror of it, for they feared the stain of simony.

“If we calmly consider the circumstances ; if dangers to the Church were really foreseen, and it was believed impossible to avoid them except by resort to this extreme measure ; if, I say, this persuasion existed, it seems to me that no guilt of simony would have been incurred by a promise to do what it was believed would necessarily have to be done. It must be remembered, too, that the injury which would arise from the expulsion of the

Jesuits was not as well understood then as it has been subsequently from its consequences both in Europe and on the missions. Men were led to believe that means could be found everywhere for supplying the void which the Society would leave.

“As to Clement XIV., in my opinion, natural character must be allowed its share. It seems quite certain that before he became a Cardinal he was a *good religious, good theologian, friend of the Society*. After his election came the rage and fury of our enemies, their multifarious calumnies, which did not fail to have some effect on the minds of even the well-disposed, especially when the effect of the calumny is not promptly destroyed by a peremptory answer, which in those days of the *universal deluge* was difficult, or even impossible: all this, and then the troubles of the Church, and the still greater troubles with which it was threatened, might well, I think, inspire fear, *timorem qui etiam movere possit hominem constantem*. All goes to show only too clearly the truth of the expression, *Compulsus feci*—I was forced to do it—and the Pope’s frequent changes of mind, and his long delays, all indicate anguish of conscience. It is clear that Clement XIV. put it off as long as he could; he endured unprecedented violence. This business poisoned his whole pontificate. ‘Poor Pope,’ wrote St Alphonsus Liguori, ‘*Che poteva fare?*—What could he do?’ This is a view to which I subscribe with all my heart; and it constitutes, as it seems to me, the Pontiff’s true defence.

“Then there are God’s judgments: faults, even serious faults, in many members of the Society. In so great a number is it surprising? It seems God wished to purify and to chastise the Society. Did He not wish at the same time to punish the world? Was there not also great mercy shown to the Society in saving it from great misfortunes, by

withdrawing it from scandals which perhaps it would have wanted strength to resist?

"I set down my thoughts here as they occur to me: I leave them to you. Far be it from me to force on you my way of viewing the matter. No, I have no intention of putting your mind to the torture; it might be injurious to your feeble bodily health, and besides, success would not be easy.

"But the point as to which, above all, a vindication of Clement XIV. ought to be given, and on which it can be given triumphantly, concerns the deceitful praises lavished by the impious, and which are a real insult to his memory; such is the sort of apotheosis made of him by the revolutionary party, even within the last few years, and in the dominions of the Holy See, both in and outside the walls of Rome. They have made him a *philosopher* Pope, to begin with his life by Caracciolo, and by his spurious *Letters*. It has been said that his 'Brief of Absolution' was very much more than the mere destruction of some *perverse and rebellious monks*, to use the words of the Abbé Gioberti: that in the eyes of those who understand aright, this Brief laid the foundations of tolerance, of religious indifference; it was the first sanction given by Rome to that noble Peace of Westphalia, which for a century and a half governed the diplomacy of Europe, &c., &c. Such is the stuff that must be washed from off the fair fame of this poor Pope, and that it can be done there is no doubt.

"This is the little work, my dear Father, which no one could do better than you, as I believe, provided your views agree with mine, and a right regard for your health allows of your undertaking it. It would be to relay the foundations of F. Theiner's work, and to do well what he has done badly.

"Let us pray and hope."

Father General felt the importance of the subject so much, that he took the trouble to write the whole of this long letter with his own hand, and he added a postscript breathing of love and family feeling: we may be allowed to quote it in conclusion; the digression is not long:—"It has been represented to me, my dear Father, that you do not take enough care of your health, and, in particular, that you go out on foot in bad weather. It is a good principle, of course, but *media ad finem*—means to the end. You know what St Philip Neri used to say: '*All is vanity, except a carriage in Rome.*' I should say this exception is still more true of Paris, especially when the weather is bad. So, my dear Father, use a carriage, without any scruple about the spirit of religious poverty."

This letter was to be shown to F. Provincial only. There was, as we see, the greatest latitude allowed to F. de Ravignan; he was quite at liberty to decline the proposal, and if he accepted it, he might take whatever line he pleased, so long as he defended the honour of the Holy See. He looked on his Superior's wish as an order, and the plan he adopted was the following:—He brought together in the title of his book the names of Clement XIII. and Clement XIV., the high-minded champion and the reluctant destroyer of the Society, and he proposed to give glory to the former and to justify the latter, and to show that on this point, as on all others, the expression of the Count de Maistre which he took for his motto is verified, and that the Popes have need of nothing but the truth.

This book is not exactly what is called a valuable addition to our literature; it is much more; it is an authority of great moral weight. An author, who throughout the whole course of his work speaks with calm dignity, is believed when he says, I have written with no bitter feeling in

my heart, with no contentious or litigious spirit. He has confined himself to a simple statement, and by some critics this has been made a ground of reproach. These critics forget that he was not an advocate, but was merely charged to report the facts on a question where conviction must spring from the history itself when impartially written, and that consequently his readers had no right to look for any other eloquence than that of facts.

Hence the author's style is marked by an absence of all personal pretension, of all human passion. We may judge of this from the calm tone of the following final reply to all the attacks which have been directed against the Society of Jesus:—

“We are priests, religious, and men like other men; like other men we have a right to be believed to be governed by conscience, by Christian motives of thought and action, until our acts shall have proved us false to duty. The Jesuits stand alone in being excluded from the benefit of this righteous law; and the reason of this exclusion is, I confess, an enigma which I am unable to solve. God will easily solve the difficulty; I adore the designs of His wisdom, whereby He is pleased that a small society of religious should be the object of unceasing prejudice, attack, and even persecution: blessed be His Name!

“Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, owed His triumph to His Life of poverty and suffering, to the ignominy He endured, to His renouncement of self-will, to the pains of His Passion, to His death and burial.

“This is enough to enable us to understand the lot we have on earth, and to lead us to render untiring thanks to our Lord. We shall draw force and life from humiliation, from calumny, from persecution, from labour, from the misconceptions of men regarding our woes and our works,—yes, and

from death itself: these are the weapons with which the Gospel overcame the world and hell. My mind and my heart find satisfaction in these words. I am silent, and find comfort in my silence."

The heart of the writer occasionally breaks forth in a few admirable pages, which cannot be read without their causing something of the very emotion by which they were inspired. Let us listen to him as he bewails those thousands of Jesuits who were torn with violence from the Society, which they had adopted as the true country of their souls, their chosen family.

"After I have faithfully and without complaint or lament told the story of the persecutions, the anguish, the long death-struggle and the end of these my Fathers in religion, shall I be condemned if I revert for a moment to these painful restraints, these brutal expulsions, these dungeons, these insults heaped upon the outlaws? Above all, I have before my mind this violent separation of loving brothers: I feel as though I were with them and were one of them at the time of their heart-rending farewells. This was far more grievous than banishment and exile; far more grievous, I assert, than the loss of fatherland and family. A religious receives a new birth and a new Baptism in his profession of the life and Rule to which, in compliance with God's call, his mind, his heart, his whole being have been consecrated. Through the influence of a love springing from supernatural grace, he contracts deeper, dearer, better ties than the ties which bind men to the soil of their birth or to the familiar intercourse of the family circle. The vows, regular discipline, the life strictly in common, the spirit which vivifies the body and permeates every member, the sameness of work, of thought, the irrevocable dedication of our whole future life to the Society which adopts us for her children, the

profound security which, under the authority of our Mother, serves as our protection in every place, at every time, in every necessity of soul and even of body. All these things serve to knit us together with a love stronger than nature, stronger than death; a love which makes us in the religious profession become one with our Brethren, with the toils and enterprises of the Society, with its successes, its reverses, and its very life.

“The love felt for the Society, the grace found in the Society, the union preserved in the Society, are hidden treasures which can scarcely be explained and scarcely comprehended except among those transmuted elements of which this religious country and family is constituted. When then their dissolution is decreed, their vocation frustrated, the order of death put forth, it is a martyrdom of inexpressible bitterness; the religious is no longer a religious, though he ceases not to long after and to love his vocation, and he becomes for this world as one who in a moment loses the inheritance of treasures a thousand times more precious than country, than family, a thousand times more precious than existence; it is a grief far more bitter than banishment and exile. The infancy in religion of a novice, the painful course of studies, the protracted, happy exercise of long retreats, converse with one’s Brethren and their friendship, the gift of God himself; the freedom from all anxiety, the wealth found in the exact practice of poverty which displays clearly the hand of Providence ever ready to feed, to clothe, to rock to sleep the infants; the blessed guidance of a Father’s authority, and the sacred bonds formed by a community of trials, wishes, aims, suffering, and happiness in all the countries of the world: all this makes up a degree of happiness, toilsome it is true, but great beyond conception, to lose

which is more bitter than the bitterest misfortune. There is still in the asylum which is called resignation an unspoken respectful honour paid to the sorrow which is one's burden and one's love."

Some hostile criticisms were mingled with the applause which greeted the publication of the "Apology for Clement XIII. and Clement XIV." Whatever can in reason be alleged on either side is found comprised in some remarks full of delicacy and good sense which were sent to the author by the friend whose name we mentioned in connection with the book on the *Existence and Institute of the Jesuits*. M. Trognon, who had been tutor to one of the sons of the Queen Marie-Amélie now in exile, filled the office of her secretary; he wrote the following letter to F. de Ravignan, dated from St Leonard's in England;—

"VERY DEAR REVEREND FATHER,—I have just finished the perusal of your work. I was carried away by the interest of the subject, and did not think of pausing for a moment to exercise the functions of a critic as you commissioned me. Not that from time to time, on my way through the book, I did not meet with particular points which I might have wished to be otherwise expressed, but I paid them little attention; my thoughts were fixed on the matter of the work far more than on any details of form, notwithstanding the sensitiveness of my literary taste.

"Either I am much deceived, or the effect will be the same upon your readers. It seems impossible, in the face of the great and lofty interest of this book, to attach more importance to excellence of style than has been attached by the author. Moreover, the style is on the whole full, weighty, and suitable to the subject, and I really am not sure that the work would gain by the removal of a

few incorrect expressions, a few faults against harmony or elegance ; or by greater length being given to two or three rather curt phrases, where the thought seems not to arrive at maturity. All this is lost in the general movement with which the book is alive—a movement which never ceases, but which makes itself felt none the less strongly, and which is due far more to priestly faith than to literary skill. I recognise your whole self in your book, my very dear Father, and that is why I love it as it is.

“The most serious objection I have to take to it applies to the first chapter, the *Picture of the Period*. This chapter seemed to me somewhat wanting in colour and vigour ; I should like to see deeper relief given to it ; I could have wished that from the facts you have brought together, you had brought out more fully the state of war against the Jesuits in which the Catholic courts were then involved. I should not ask for any other characters of the period than what you have collected ; but I should like more prominence to have been given them, and that the chapter should produce a more lively and striking impression.

“Nothing remains, very dear Reverend Father, but to thank you for the pleasure you have given me in the perusal of so calm and dignified a work, so full of that spirit of charity and peace which we should be glad to meet with in all books which relate to the affairs of the Church.”

Throughout the time that his labour lasted, F. de Ravignan shrouded himself in the most absolute secrecy ; such were his orders. The book was already in the press before any one knew that it had been thought of ; and the newspapers which announced that it was on sale, were the first which let the public know that it had been undertaken.

and executed. "What news!" wrote M. Molé: "a book by you!" I am all excitement; the author, the particular occasion, the general occasion, everything combines to raise to the highest point, not merely my curiosity, but my most lively and affectionate interest. I am much touched at your saying that in my case it cost you something to keep this long and well-observed secrecy. Why, even the Bishop of Orleans was excluded from the secret! After that, I certainly have no ground of complaint." F. de Ravignan extended the secrecy even to his Brethren, with the exception of such as had a right to knowledge. Accordingly, he found the time for this extra task wherever he could; and no change in his habits was observed, nor any relaxation in the labours of his ministry. He showed prudence in thus enveloping his work in mystery: he secured himself against the annoyance of questions, and perhaps against the embarrassment of opposition.

The work on Clement XIII. and Clement XIV. could not of course expect great popularity; what is serious has never been fashionable. Still the book had a certain sale: the first edition was soon exhausted. It was spoken of by all the periodicals, and in various terms according to the spirit of the paper. But what was F. de Ravignan's only ambition, he has had the last word, and he will have to wait long for a reply which in the eyes of persons of sense will seem an answer to his arguments.

This was Count Molé's opinion, as we gather from the sequel of the letter, the opening of which has already been given: "You have made further hesitation impossible to any man who is free from prejudice and earnest after truth. Nothing reminds me so much of the Passion of our Saviour as this excellent account of the persecution of the Society

of Jesus. You remain calm and resigned when drawing a picture of so much iniquity, but the reader is full of emotion, of horror, and the more because you recommend forgiveness.

"Will you allow me, in spite of my inability to judge properly of such a book, to tell you in all simplicity the impression which it made upon me? The suggestion to give you the order to undertake it came to F. Roothaan from God himself, and God himself guided your hand as you wrote. I had always looked on the suppression of the Jesuits as an act of the most odious violence, and as one of the greatest faults ever committed by Crowned Heads; but until now, the truth had never been demonstrated with so much authority, with so much depth, and in a manner so suited to convince the intellects and penetrate the hearts of all. You have done service not only to the order of the Jesuits, but also, and in a higher degree, to the cause of religion and of moral and political order, which, without professing such a design, you have immensely benefited. What is most difficult to express, and what will gain you most readers, is the tone of charity, the resignation, the forgetfulness of mortal injuries which breathe from one end to the other of the book."

The Rev. F. Beckx, the new General of the Society, also sent F. de Ravignan an expression of his gratitude: "When you wrote *Clement XIII. and Clement XIV.* you carried out the last wish of our revered F. Roothaan, and I feel that I must express to you the most lively gratitude in the name of our deceased Father. I believe that as time goes on this book will do more and more good. At any rate the Society has done something for the cure of the evil which others had done; and all in the Society will feel gratitude that

you have so well discharged the difficult and delicate task which was laid upon you."

A copy of the work was laid at the feet of the Sovereign Pontiff. The common Father of the great Catholic family is the friend of peace; his first impression, therefore, was one of pain. "But why," he asked, "revive this distressing controversy?" "Holy Father," replied the Prelate who had presented the volume to him, "this is not a book of controversy; it contains no attack upon individuals; the facts are merely stated, and the Holy See defended in the history of two Popes." His Holiness turned over a few pages, and then placed the book again in the hands from which he had received it. "I have not time," he said, "to read the work through myself; take it and you can give me your account." A few days after, the Prelate made his report which fully satisfied his Holiness; the truth was recognised that F. de Ravignan had deserved well of the Church and of the Society.

The death of F. Roothaan took place before the completion of the work which he had suggested; and the election of a successor took F. de Ravignan from his task for several months. The state of Father General's health had long given rise to serious apprehension; he was attacked by a choking asthma, and by a grave affection of the heart. The whole Society joined in prayer, and F. de Ravignan, full of resignation and confidence in all his sorrow, exclaimed, "Let us say the 'Our Father' well: 'Thy will be done' in each of us and in all things! Let us be detached from earth and throw ourselves wholly upon the adorable will of our Lord." These words had become familiar to him: he repeated them on every trial that came to him from Heaven.

On the 8th of May 1853, F. de Villefort wrote to him: "What sorrowful tidings I have to communicate! Reverend Father General gave up his pure soul to his Creator this morning at a quarter to eleven; the whole community, with whom M. de Bussières and Dr Manning had found means to mix, had been grouped round his bed for two or three hours. His second attack came on yesterday. F. Rubillon stayed up with him last night, and gave him Extreme Unction about eleven o'clock. This morning he was able to attend to the Mass, which I said for him as usual in his room at five; but he was deprived of the happiness of receiving Holy Communion. Yesterday morning he had that consolation. How well filled was his life with saintly works! how edifying his illness, and calm his death! *Obdormivit in Domino*, 'He fell asleep in the Lord.'"

The name left by F. Roothaan at his death will be held in lasting and grateful remembrance by the Society. He had held the government since 1829; he is distinguished among our Generals as one of those whose administration was longest and most laborious. He was overwhelmed with business and with tribulation, often assaulted from within, exposed to continual persecution from without; he was unflagging in labour, constant in prayer; and the prayer most familiar to him was the cry of trustful distress, *Jesus, have mercy*. He was a man of prayer and a perfect Superior according to the ideal of the Institute, and his government was directed by a prudence which was surpassed only by his kindness. He was one of those who, since the restoration of the Society, have done the most to restore the use of the Exercises of St Ignatius; he annotated them with a wisdom which betokens not only a deep acquaintance with spiritual science, but yet more the very special

assistance of God. His loss was felt by all the children of the Society as that of a Father; F. de Ravignan's regret was also regret for a Friend.

It became necessary to think of the election of a new General. The Professed Fathers in each province of the Society met immediately in separate Congregations to choose two deputies to accompany their Provincial to the General Congregation, which is held in Rome.

F. de Ravignan was chosen one of the deputies for the Paris province. On the 5th of June he set out; on the 9th he was at Marseilles, and said Mass in the church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde, to secure the protection of our Blessed Lady for the Society; on the 12th he reached Rome. The three provincials and six deputies from France were the first to arrive at the Gesù; the deputies from the other provinces of Europe soon followed, and the General Congregation opened on the evening of the 22d.

Charity led F. de Ravignan to take in hand at once the keeping of a sort of journal, to let his Brethren in France know all that passed in Rome. We have no hesitation in publishing this piece of what may almost be called family correspondence, the perusal of which seems to make the reader take part in a General Congregation held for the election of a successor to St Ignatius. A statesman familiar with assemblies of a very different character, Count Molé, wrote on the subject:—"Nothing can be so beautiful or so affecting as all these men assembling from such various parts of the world, who never met, but who are closely united by oneness of faith, obeying the same rule, one and all without difficulty abstaining from uttering a single word bearing on the all-important choice which they are about to make, abstaining even from forming a judgment concerning it, until the time appointed

for invoking the Holy Spirit to come and be their Guide."

F. de Ravignan's account begins from his very first arrival: we will give a few details unconnected with the Congregation, but which we think will be found to have some interest. On the 14th of June he wrote:—

"Father Vicar and the Assistants, and the other Fathers of the Professed House, received us with the greatest cordiality. This afternoon we shall go to visit our Fathers in the other houses in Rome.

"This morning I waited on Cardinal Antonelli, taking the despatches of the Paris Nunciature. He received me most graciously; he is very well disposed towards the Society, has a good head, and seems very well informed upon French affairs. Then I went to pay my first visit to St Peter's. How beautiful and grand it is! I was really affected at seeing it again.

"On coming home it occurred to me to write and chat with you a little. So far I have heard no news. The impression I have gathered is very good, and indicates dispositions favourable to the greater glory of God. We are going to pray and prepare ourselves in our Lord for the election."

Three days after, he wrote: "Yesterday, on June 16, Father Vicar had an audience with the Holy Father. The Pope received him very kindly, and said, 'Who is going to be the General?' 'Only the Holy Spirit knows that,' answered F. Pierling. 'Quite right,' replied the Pope. Father Vicar then put into his hands the *formula* for the General Congregation, taken from the Institute. The Holy Father looked through this collection of the formalities to be observed, seemed very well satisfied, and expressed his wish that everything might be done exactly in conformity with the Constitutions of the Society.

"Yesterday was the Feast of the French Assistancy and of St Francis Regis, and the Superiors and principal Fathers of the other houses in Rome dined at the Gesù, by invitation from F. Rubillon. Hence we formed a very large party, and it was necessary to put a long extra table in the middle of the refectory. The truest cordiality prevailed among all ; there was no symptom of thoughtfulness or anxiety. As far as I have heard, no name has been mentioned by way of anticipation of the election ; religious reserve is maintained."

On the 24th, he took up his journal again : " On the 21st, the feast of St Aloysius Gonzaga, I was at the Roman College, close to the tomb of the dear Saint, in the midst of the processions, the singing, and the flowers which were the decorations of his magnificent feast. I do not think there can have been a single Scholastic or Lay Brother at the First Dinner, where near a hundred and twenty or thirty Fathers dined. There was one unbroken chain of fresh-gathered roses and thyme running along the tables, and marking out the place of each of the guests. There was silence and reading during dinner, as there was at the Gesù on St Francis Regis' day. An Italian Bishop, who had sung the High Mass, sat on the right of Father Vicar. The people came in troops to the church and to the beautiful chapel of the young Saint, which was decorated and lighted up, as they so well know in Rome how to decorate and illuminate. The whole of the immense interior of the church was lined with red and gold drapery, set off with rows of lustres. What then must heaven be ?

"The 22d was appointed for the opening of our Congregation. After the chanting of the *Veni Creator*, Father Vicar, in compliance with the rule prescribed by the Institute, gave the Congregation an account of all that had happened since the

death of the late General. The time had been short, and there was very little to say. In making his report he spoke becomingly of our revered F. Roothaan.

"I do not mention in detail all that was done at this first sitting; you find a full report of it if you look at the *formula*; it was followed literally.

"One of the Fathers has to give the prescribed exhortation on the day of the Election, immediately after the hour of prayer which precedes the voting. My name came out of the urn with a considerable majority of votes. So I have got to give a Latin discourse. Be it so.

"The Election day has been fixed for July 2, the feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin: *Sub umbra protectionis Mariæ*, 'Under the shadow of Mary's protection.' Consequently, the appointed *four days* of retreat and informations will begin on the morning of the 28th. Everything is going on well. The business is all got through in peace, concord, and silence. I do not think anything has as yet happened to indicate any name for the Election day. Pray for us and with us.

"This morning, the 23d, the Pope received the deputies of the Congregation with the greatest kindness, spoke to them with the warmest expressions of affection, did not use a word which gave the most distant hint of any wish as to the choice of a General, spoke playfully of our being put on bread and water on the day of the Election for as long as the sitting lasts. He repeated again and again that the *Civiltà* had his *most formal approval*, and he expressed a wish that it might be kept up uninterruptedly. This periodical numbers at present from twelve to thirteen thousand subscribers. In particular his Holiness spoke highly of the last article on table-turning and the world of spirits."

F. de Ravignan took up his journal again on

June 29, the feast of St Peter and Paul: "The 24th was the feast of the Patron Saint in the Basilica of St John Lateran, which serves as the Cathedral of the Sovereign Pontiffs. The Pope was present: it was appointed that after Mass he should publish the final decree for the Beatification of our Father Andrew Bobola, who was martyred in White Russia, and of Germaine Cousin, a shepherdess of the diocese of Toulouse. We had to be present at the ceremony.

"We were admitted, by a particular signal, into the sacristy, behind the seats of the Cardinals, and remained standing all the time. The Holy Father came in at the conclusion of the office of the Basilica. Father Vicar, and Mgr. Lestrade, the postulator of the cause of Germaine Cousin, made in turn their short addresses, kneeling on the ground; F. Vicar in Italian, Mgr. Lestrade in French. The Pope replied to the two together. His voice is strong, with a marked accentuation; he speaks really very well and readily. He spent a short time on a paraphrase of these two words, *fortitudo et decor*, 'strength and comeliness,' with reference to the martyr and the shepherdess; and the idea was carried out successfully. He went on to say that he had been much affected by the sudden deaths of two persons for whom he had great affection, Mgr. Garibaldi the Nuncio at Paris, and Cardinal Brignole, who died at Rome. He added a few words of praise on our late General, F. Roothaan, and expressed a hope that his successor would equal him in prudence. He spoke of the Society with great kindness, and returned to the subject of prudence, as if he wished to repeat his recommendation. His words and his countenance alike expressed good-will; many of the Cardinals gave unmistakeable signs of approval of the flattering passages relating to the

memory of F. Roothaan and the Society. Afterwards we were all admitted to kiss his feet.

"I am much edified at the way in which the informations for the Election are taken. Really, it seems to me that the Spirit of God is reigning here; there is no appearance of any movement or inclination in favour of any one.

"The day after to-morrow, July 2, is the great day: *Ostende quem elegeris*, 'Show whom Thou hast chosen.' I enjoy a quiet laugh at the apprehensions some friends of France feel about myself.

"I have just been looking over and completing my little Latin exhortation. May it at least help our Fathers a little in the practice of prayer!"

At length, on July 2, F. de Ravignan wrote: "Glory to God and the Blessed Virgin; we are leaving the church where the *Te Deum* has been sung.

"The great business was completed at half-past eight this morning, amidst the profoundest peace and recollection. Reverend Father Beckx, the Provincial of Austria, was elected General at the first taking of the votes.

"Immediately after the opening of the voting papers, Father Vice-Prefect and F. Minini repaired to the Vatican. The Pope received them with the utmost kindness. He said, 'This is the anniversary of the French entering Rome; you have done your work French-fashion, quickly.' He sent his benediction to the object of our choice. We have installed our new General and done him homage, kneeling on both knees, and kissing his hand. When F. Beckx was called on to take the chair prepared for the Father chosen, he threw himself on his knees before all the Congregation and said, almost word for word, 'You have laid on me a cross to carry; I take it on me out of obedience. Have pity on me at least you, and pray. . . .'"

On July 9, F. de Ravignan wrote :—

“On Sunday the 3d, Father-General, with the old Assistants, went to see the Pope, who gave them a very kind reception. F. General came back filled with consolation and strength. This morning we chose the new Assistants; F. Ferrari for Italy; F. Pierling for Germany; F. Rubillon for France; and for Spain, F. Gil, who is in Guatemala.

“F. Pierling was chosen Admonitor. Some days ago, before the election of the General, F. Patrizi was chosen Secretary to the Congregation. F. Peters and I are appointed to help him, and so, with the General, we are the men in office. Work will not be wanting.

“We have already discussed at some length, but without settling, the question of determining whether to create a new Assistancy for England and America, (the English language).”

On the same day, after mentioning the nominations to the different offices, with which the Society encircles the office of General, he remarked with several notes of admiration, that some misdirected votes had destined for him the office of Assistant for the French Provinces; he then added :—

“All our elections are now over; so people are reassured about me. And you, my dear Fathers in Paris, you are condemned to see me again among you!

“The Congregation has intrusted to F. General the care of settling the number of Commissions, *Deputaciones*, and of choosing the members of which they are to be composed: there will be one for Studies, another for Poverty, a third for Discipline, and perhaps some others.

“I thought it right, by the advice of F. Beckx, to ask an audience with the Holy Father. He had spoken of my being in Rome, and had seemed to

express a wish to see me. I wrote to the Master of the Chamber, Mgr. Borromeo, who came in person to visit me, and to say that the Holy Father would receive me one of these days."

On July 15, F. de Ravignan wrote: "In the different Commissions we are busy preparing the matter of the decrees to be proposed to the General Congregation. I am on the Commission for Poverty.

"On Sunday the 10th, I had my private audience with the Holy Father; he was full of kindness, and kept me half an hour: we were quite alone. I brought him news of the names of the new Assistants: he seemed satisfied. Moreover, he expressed in the fullest manner his satisfaction at the election of F. Beckx, adding his expectation that his administration would turn out all that it ought to be.

"But especially the Holy Father talked at some length about France, asking many questions. I took a note of this important conversation, and I will show it you at some suitable time and place. All that I can say at present is, that I was quite at my ease, and that I was able to speak openly, as far as I was allowed to go. I came from the audience with an interior happiness, which gave me great comfort."

The note of the conversation of July 10, at the Quirinal, finds its natural place here. We will give some extracts, which will suffice to prove that the French Jesuit when at Rome did not speak against France.

"THE POPE. 'Well, how are things going on in Paris?'

"F. DE RAVIGNAN. 'Holy Father, everything is quiet there.'

"THE POPE. 'But Paris is the centre of France, and the place where all the priests meet who may have to leave their own dioceses.'

"F. DE RAVIGNAN. 'I can assure your Holiness that if there are some bad priests in Paris, there are also many good ones, very good ones. I believe I am right in asserting that in case of any attack on the Holy See, if it made the slightest appeal to the devotion of the Church of France, the country, the nation, whatever their theories may be, would be found practically the most devoted to your Holiness, and to all the rights of the Roman Church.'

"THE POPE. 'Yes, I agree with you. But then, why is the contrary language used? In almost all the Seminaries of France they taught Bailly's theology, which is very unfavourable to the Holy See? It was I myself, none but I, (his Holiness laid emphasis on the expression,) that brought Bailly's theology before the *Index*.

"'In the affair of the *Univers* too, it was said that I was excited to hostile action against the Archbishop of Paris, by the letter which he wrote to me at Gaeta. No, things of that sort do not remain long on a Pope's heart. A person is not made Pope for his own pleasure, but to carry his Cross, following our Lord, and imitating Him.

"'Besides, I do not make any newspaper my own, and I do not defend the *Univers*. They wanted me to have it condemned; I do not approve of all he wrote, but it was no case for a condemnation.

"'Many things are told me about this or that person; I take or leave as much as I think right.

"'A wish is attributed to me absolutely to enforce the Roman Liturgy in France; I am not more anxious for it than is reasonable; but I cannot allow every Bishop to have the power of drawing up a Missal or Breviary at his own pleasure. As to particular rites, I would authorise them cheerfully.

"'I have received letters pressing me to condemn

Traditionalism. Why will not men have patience ! They want to have done with human reason ; but if there is no more of this poor human reason, very soon there will be no more faith. Each must have its own part.’

“The Holy Father did not say a word to me on politics. The conversation touched on various subjects ; the rest of it turned on the Society, and the General Congregation, and the clearest expressions of good-will were employed.”

F. de Ravignan’s kindness in sending his account to his Brethren was continued till the end of the Congregation : “God protects us, we work and deliberate with tranquillity. Everything still goes well. Our labours will, I trust, by God’s grace, produce their fruit. Very Reverend Father General is the personification of humility and patience. His calmness is unbroken. Though overwhelmed with business, he retains perfect self-mastery. His most prominent character is kindness with uprightness. God will give him a blessing. He is becoming much fatigued, it is time to leave him free. Up to this it has been impossible to speak with him ; I have twice had an interview of five minutes.”

Again, on August 21, he wrote : “To-day we are going to St Peter’s for the Beatification of our Venerable F. John de Britto ; we shall offer our prayers to him together, and thank our Lord for giving us a new protector in this holy martyr. I shall take much pleasure in this beautiful ceremony, reflecting on the end of all our ills on earth. When there is to be a Beatification, the Pope merely comes the evening before, to pray in presence of a picture and relic of the ‘Servant of God.’”

On the 27th he speaks of a second private audience with the Pope : “The three French Provincials commissioned me to ask—*First*, for the

special blessing of his Holiness on the members and the works of the Society in France; *Secondly*, for the liberty of saying Matins and Lauds every day at two o'clock; *Thirdly*, for a hundred days' indulgence in each of our houses for every recital of a prayer before a representation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, or of the Blessed Virgin.

"These three favours were granted; the blessing was given by his Holiness with his whole heart—*toto corde*—and in the fullest terms; as to the Breviary, the Pope granted my request, adding with his own hand, 'For any just cause,' *Accedente justa causa*; the indulgence for the recital of the Hail Mary three times before the picture. The Holy Father is rather particular on these matters."

At length, on August 31, F. de Ravignan wrote: "We leave Rome to-day. Yesterday the Pope received us all with great kindness; we are going directly to hold our last sitting, and then the *Te Deum*. All goes well. We shall soon meet. For God on the Cross!"

He brought back from Rome a precious and acceptable legacy, the small crucifix of brass and wood formerly belonging to F. Godinot, before which he had so often knelt at Estavayer during his Third Year of Probation. After the death of the holy old man, this image of the Redeemer came into the hands of F. Roothaan, whose soul had derived from it strength and consolation in his passage from time to eternity. On a metal plate fastened to it was engraved the inscription: *Hac cruce utebantur P. Nicolaus Godinot et P. Joannes Roothaan, ambo quomodo in vita sua ita et in morte in Christo crucifixo conjunctissimi*—"This crucifix was used by F. Nicholas Godinot, and by F. John Roothaan, in life and in death most closely united

in the love of Christ crucified." This sacred heirloom, already hallowed by the last kisses of two revered Fathers, was preserved in our house in the Rue de Sèvres, where it was destined to console the last hours of a third of the friends.





CHAPTER XXIII.

APOSTOLATE TO GREAT AND POOR.

The Victorious Commander at the Alma becomes a Penitent of F. de Ravignan, and dies a Christian death—F. de Ravignan preaches the Lent at the Tuileries, and at the house of the Little Sisters of the Poor.



DE RAVIGNAN brought back with him from Rome a valuable present to a soldier, who was to die the following year in the land of the enemy, and on the morrow of a victory. It was a precious cameo, sent by the Sovereign Pontiff to Marshal de Saint-Arnaud. For some months previously a close intimacy had sprung up between the Jesuit and the future commander of the army of the East.

The Marshal was of a chivalrous disposition, and had been long filled with a reckless spirit of adventure; he had run countless dangers in pursuing the ambitious dreams of fortune; and when he had at length attained his ideal of glory, his heart was still unsatiated, and he saw how deceptive is all greatness here below. A warning of the approach of death soon came and helped to disenchant him. When Minister of War, overwhelmed with business and anxiety, a prey to an interior malady, which was full of pain and anguish, he

turned his thoughts to Him who promises a better life, and Who said, Come to Me all ye that labour and are heavy burdened, and I will refresh you.

The Marshal was of all men in the world the least capable either of putting on a hypocritical show of Christianity, or of concealing his faith out of human respect. He made no secret of his believing. Whenever F. de Ravignan went to the Minister's official residence, or the Minister came to the room of the religious, it was in the light of day, and it may be said the brave soldier made his Confessions in the presence of all the army and of all the Court.

In fact we know that all characters are formed for religion, and without it remain imperfect. With this divine corrective, the man becomes complete; he is of course always the same, but he is better. The religious was pleased to find in this man, when at length he yielded, a rare degree of honesty, a frankness approaching roughness, an energy which nothing could subdue.

A frequent correspondence was opened; the earliest letters being dated from the office of the Minister of War in Paris, the latest from headquarters before Sebastopol; it discloses something of the private intercourse between the confessor and the penitent. As I am able to produce their letters, I am bound to do so to God's glory, and that one more proof may be given, that sympathy soon grows up between the priest and the soldier.

First, I find a series of notes dated on the great Christian anniversaries throughout the year. The Marshal was a man to take the first step in every occupation, and he was always beforehand even with F. de Ravignan, and asked the appointment of a day and hour for a pious interview. Among these notes I read: "To-morrow is Christmas-day, and the troublesome business of the world does

not make me forget my duties towards God." Another time: "Anxious as I was to see you, I did not like to disturb your pious meditations. But I want to remind you that you were good enough to promise to hear me to-morrow, Whitsunday."

The Marshal came punctual to the minute, made his confession in F. de Ravignan's room, and went straight to the chapel of the house, where he heard Mass and received Communion.

We will give one of the outpourings of his heart on the subject of his change of life: "My resolution has not grown at all weaker. I feel the benefit of religion more and more strongly every day; my soul is raised up to God, to thank Him with fervour for the infinite grace I have received. But in the swift stream wherein my life is spent, in the middle of business and of the exactions of the world, I have not sufficient time to give to reflection and to reading on serious subjects. I shall have great need, dear Father, of your indulgence and of God's mercy."

A library of useful books, chosen by F. de Ravignan, and a chapel served by one of the chaplains, were established at the War Office by order of his Excellency and for his own private use.

During the preparations for the war in the East, which the Marshal, no less heroic in facing disease than battle, determined to direct in person, F. de Ravignan called his attention to the organisation of the religious establishment for the service of the Expeditionary Army. The Generalissimo made a beautiful reply: "How came you to think for a moment that I should neglect to surround the brave soldiers of the army of the East with all the helps and consolations of religion? I am taking all pains to make our soldiers moral, to ensure

that good thoughts occupy their hearts ; soldiers truly religious would be the first soldiers in the world."

One point in this correspondence gave F. de Ravignan a good laugh. He had been appointed, as we mentioned, one of the deputies to go from Paris to Rome for the election of a new General for the Society. The illustrious Marshal knew his own profession better than ours, and might well think that in the Society, as in the army, no higher compliment could be paid than to anticipate that a private soldier would become General ; and the esteem in which F. de Ravignan was held gave, it must be acknowledged, some probability to what was suggested. The lines we subjoin were written hastily, and bear the mark of expressing a perfectly spontaneous thought : " I hope to hear that you have been unanimously elected General. Men agitate, but they are under God's guidance. God will lead you to the place to which you are to be promoted. Every one on earth, my dear Father, has his appointed place. My foresight is seldom deceived. I shall lose your valuable advice and your holy direction, but I shall have the consolation of thinking of the good you will do, and God will come to my aid. A prosperous journey to you, and good luck ! "

This time the foresight was deceived ; F. de Ravignan had a prosperous journey, and he had the good luck of not being elected. The Marshal thought very little of his reputation as a prophet when F. de Ravignan let him know that he should soon return from Rome, and at the same time told him of the magnificent cameo which he had received for him from the hands of the Sovereign Pontiff. " Whatever God does, He does well," was the answer soon returned, " and His will is never disclosed without reason. I

cannot tell you how happy I feel at the idea of again receiving your pious counsel, of which I have so much need.

"I am overwhelmed at our Holy Father's goodness; I beg you to lay my deepest respect at the feet of his Holiness, and to tell him that the kind memorial which he destines for me will be my talisman, my support and strength in the evil days. My gratitude for it shall never cease."

At length the hour for war struck. At each stage of the Marshal's glorious career he found means to have time for thinking of God, and for writing to his guide on the road to heaven.

In a letter dated April 5, 1854, he said: "I set off on Monday, and I hope not to leave Paris and France without once more having the benefit of your advice, and asking your prayers. I have great need of your help with God to obtain me His aid in the great enterprise, the responsibility of which He has allowed to be laid upon me, and which He alone can enable me to bring to a happy conclusion. Without God's help nothing can be done, and I put all my trust in His mercy and in the protection which He extends to France. I look forward to asking you to give me an hour before I leave, for the fulfilment of my Christian duties."

He wrote again to F. de Ravignan on the 25th of the same month, while busied about the embarkation at Marseilles: "Now I am on the point of starting, I have perfect confidence. God cannot refuse His protection to France in so grave, so solemn, a crisis. I feel sure that every one will do his duty and more than his duty. The cause we fight for is just. Let us keep up our hopes then, Reverend Father, and give me your blessing."

On June 20, he wrote from Constantinople: "In four days I shall leave for Varna, where I am going to establish my head-quarters, and where all

the army will assemble on July 5. Between the 10th and the 15th I shall march against the Russians. Pray God, dear Father, to bless our arms. My faith is in Him, and I call for His assistance, without which we can do nothing. He has already bestowed on me a great mark of His mercy by restoring me to health ; now France calls for His protection, and I pray for this every day. Farewell. I recommend myself to your prayers."

Finally, there is a last report, written as usual wholly in the Marshal's hand, dated from the headquarters, Old Fort, Crimea, Sept. 18, which I will copy :

"Reverend Father, I received your kind letter dated from Saint-Acheul, August 20, this very morning, and I will not lose a moment in thanking you for your pious wishes and prayers: the Most High has granted them! By the 14th we had effected the safe landing of the whole army in the Crimea ; it is in superb condition, and the temper of the men excellent. The disembarkation was effected amid repeated cries of *Vive l'Empereur!* and to the same cry we will to-morrow break the Russian columns which are awaiting us on the Alma, and which will not hinder my establishing myself in Sebastopol on the 22d or 23d at the latest.

"I am hastening the operations as much as possible, for my health is very bad, and I pray God to keep my strength to the last. As soon as I have planted the French flag on Sebastopol, I will go and ask of France that perfect repose which I find has become absolutely necessary.

"Farewell, Reverend Father ; pray for us, and believe in the respectful affection, &c."

The following day the Marshal, hiding from all the knowledge of the acute and mortal pain he suffered, marched against the Russians, and over-

threw them ; and on the next day but one passed from the field of battle to his bed, to die a Christian death. Had he not lived long enough ? Religion and glory, both were present in his last hour. The Black Sea, which had lately witnessed a very different scene, saw a vessel bearing the remains of the victor of the Alma, and his country prepared for him a funeral which was a triumphal procession.

F. de Ravignan felt the stunning blow of this news as if it had been a national disaster, and he wrote to the mourning widow, who was herself accompanying the sorrowful train across the sea. This letter, so consoling, and which sheds such lustre on the memory of the General that died as a Christian hero, must find its place in the present history as a last monument raised by the friendship of the priest to the religion of the soldier.

“MADAM,—The regret and the tears of the army and of France mingle with your own. Will you allow me to add with all respect the expression of my sorrow and my sympathy ? Others shall speak of the Marshal’s firm and generous character, of his courage and military genius, or of his astonishing energy. I prefer, Madam, to recall at present only the purest part of his glory, which he owed after God, to you : he was a Christian. In the boundless grief you feel, and under the weight of this irreparable loss, you can and ought to feel at least that your prayers and your example brought this great soul to the open profession of religion, and to the practice of all the duties which it imposes. You know the chivalrous fidelity with which he came to receive the Bread of the Strong before his leaving Paris ; and he wrote to me from Marseilles, the day before he embarked, that he leaned with confidence on the

help of God, without Whom nothing can be accomplished. Pain and sickness were upon him; they accompanied him on his noble enterprise. God had decreed him a double triumph—victory to our arms, and the death of a Christian hero, whose glory, as we may say, clothed him for his burial.

“Pause upon the thought that this soul has left you only for a time. You had given it to God. He accepts it, and receives it back prepared and hallowed by your pious influence. You will one day meet him again; he has only gone before you on the road which you opened for him. His feelings of Christian faith and hope are your own; they will be your support and guide to the end.

“I know well that you are crushed by sorrow: it may seem that nothing can soften your anguish; pardon my having ventured to speak of it. You will understand the call I felt in my heart. I bewail the death of a friend; I could not but speak of it to you, reminding you of what you knew so well, that afflicted souls find in God their refuge and their support.

“My prayers and my regret accompany the Marshal’s precious remains. So soon as I shall hear that you are returned, I shall make a point of waiting on you to express my heart-felt sorrow. Accept it, Madam, together with the assurance of my most respectful and unalterable devotion.”

The counsel and example of the Marshal, in whom the valour and the faith of Bayard, of Turenne, and of Condé lived again, had contributed powerfully to re-awaken in our army the spirit of Christianity and of chivalrous generosity which gladdened Catholic France and astonished Europe, long accustomed to see other usages prevail in our camps, since the conquering days of the republic which arose in the age of Voltaire.

The figure of the Blessed Virgin was displayed on the Admiral's Ship of the fleet which carried the sons of the old Crusaders to the East: her medal and her scapular were worn next the hearts of these brave men who marched to battle under the blessing of the priests of that God Whose temples had been overthrown and altars profaned by their Fathers sixty years before. The Government seconded the zeal of the Church, and had itself asked for chaplains for this expedition, and among them were many religious of the Society of Jesus. Under these circumstances, when F. de Ravignan was preaching the Lent at the Tuileries in 1855, he began the station by these words: "Sire, lofty views of faith suit in a particular manner those who bear the formidable burden of governing the people: they should find their light and their surest guide in eternal truths. Your Majesty has perceived this, and the Church of Jesus Christ owes you, sire, the deepest gratitude for the pious manifestation of your belief, which brings down from heaven, at one and the same time, the protection of God on your authority and your arms, and comfort and joy to all Christian hearts. They are grateful to find that under your sway, power befriends religion; Catholic institutions are free and prosperous; and far from the soil which gave them birth, under the protection of the French flag, the soldier and the priest are united by bonds which give them strength, and which ensures the support of God, and a constancy that leads to victory as the recompense of heroic enterprises. When, then, a minister of the gospel is about to urge, in your presence, Sire, the weighty teachings of the faith, with confidence inspired by the God Whose messenger he is, he begins his work knowing that his sincere language will be received with full and ready approbation by your

inmost conviction. It is my wish and my duty to merit this approbation, with the Divine assistance, which I humbly crave."

The Empress, on her side, took under her protection the saintly and generous legion of the daughters of St Vincent of Paul, who went to dress the sores of the wounded, to watch by the bed-side of the dying, helping the chaplains to give holiness to their last breath. Her name was joined with that of her august husband in the conclusion of the discourse which closed the station on the Monday in Easter-week.

"Sire, the state is blessed by the religion of the prince ; the eyes of the people never cease to look towards the sovereign ; if they see him in humble recollection and attention at the foot of the altar and before the chair of truth, they cannot fail to derive the most important and salutary teaching from this august example. They will learn to understand better that authority comes from God, when they see the person that wields the authority united by this faithful piety with the Lord, the Dispenser of all gifts. In this way, the power of the State finds its surest support in conscience ; and it is true to say, with St Paul, that piety is profitable for all things ; for it brings with it divine promises and assurance for the life that now is, and for that which is to come.

"Sire, by the side of your Majesty's throne is placed another throne, which also claims our gratitude and our respect. In our good wishes and prayers we are glad to include her whom your choice has made to participate in all the most generous impulses of your heart.

"May the thrice holy God send down upon you a double portion of the blessings of heaven ! May France, great and prosperous under your sway, increase still more in faith and all the virtues

which give strength and happiness to nations. In this way, all will be safer on the road which leads to the end; and we must bear in mind what this end is—for time leads to eternity, and the merit of this life prepares for glory and the kingdom of heaven."

In such terms did the orator of the Tuileries in 1855, his sure glance at once comprehending the position of affairs, render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, without refusing to render to God the things that are God's; and criticism was silent in the presence of the dignity of the orator and the majesty of the audience.

F. de Ravignan had followed his conscience in making his preparation; that is to say, he had done all he could to secure the fruit of his ministry, absolutely nothing for the gratification of self-love. His plan was thoroughly apostolic: he made choice of the most elementary subjects, which alone appeared to him profitable; the best known truths, but, at the same time, the least borne in mind. His station was a retreat in all but the name; the Court unconsciously went through the Exercises of Manresa; and the Emperor's chapel, so well used to magnificent language, heard with surprise so subdued and stern a strain. It might have been thought that another Paul was preaching in the Areopagus of another Athens. According to the order pointed out by logic and by grace, after the 'End of Man' came 'Sin,' 'Hell' also of course, then the need of struggle, and the blessedness of faith.

F. de Ravignan was not less modest in the time he gave to preparation. He felt that he knew his own powers well, and what it was his duty to say; and on putting the question to himself, he was conscious of being master of the position at the Tuileries no less than elsewhere; and thereupon he resolved that, in order to be the

more apostolic, he ought to speak extempore. He had to preach only on Sundays, at the mid-day Mass, for the appointed half-hour. During the morning he saw visitors, and heard confessions as usual up to nine or ten o'clock. He then set about his immediate preparation, which consisted of meditation and prayer. A few words hastily written on the backs of circulars, as a summary of his matter, without anything to mark the exordium, divisions, or peroration, are all that is left of his Lent at the Tuileries ; and these meagre sketches tell more for the true glory of his apostolate than discourses of brilliant eloquence. However, he put in writing the two complimentary addresses usual at the opening and at the close of the series ; and like a child who distrusts himself, he came to submit them to be revised by his superior. They are the passages which we quoted not long since.

This was all the time spent on preparation by the preacher-in-ordinary to the Emperor, and the result showed that he had been neither rash nor presumptuous. At the Tuileries, as at Nôtre-Dame, half his eloquence was in his bearing ; an impression was produced, as soon as he was seen in the pulpit full of recollection, and making his sign of the cross ; and after he had ceased speaking, conviction remained, if not conversion. He showed himself before the Court like a man of God, who, without being of this world, knew perfectly the usages of custom and courtesy in it, and all its sorrows and its misery. Prudent and bold at once ; free, because at his ease ; reserved, as if strictly on his guard ; from the pulpit, which he entered as a poor priest, he addressed the sovereigns of the earth with the authority of God.

The zeal shown in attendance at the sermons at the Tuileries this year was such as is seldom mani-

fested. There was great competition for cards of admission to the chapel; the persons whose offices conferred the right refused to abandon it, and many inhabitants of the city, though unconnected with the palace, used every art to obtain tickets.

Two passages have been quoted by which the orator produced a more than commonly deep impression on his imperial auditory. In one of these, Bourdaloue seemed to have returned to life. We can give the substance, and almost the exact words:—

“Sire, a humble religious once preaching in the presence of a great monarch amid the splendours of Versailles, reminded him from the pulpit that, raised as he was to the eminence of supreme power, he might find it difficult to keep himself under due restraint and to respect the dictates of a prudent moderation. While men were subject to his will; while his word made law; while he was surrounded on all sides by homage, respect, and obedience, how could he recognise limits and laws superior to his supreme authority? The Christian orator resolutely pointed out to the monarch these laws and these limits, which the hand of God Himself had placed before him to check and govern his passions and his will. And Louis XIV., made greater by his faith than by his power, bowed before the sincere preaching of the word of the Gospel, and gave marked approval to the pious freedom of the priest of Jesus Christ.

“Sire, a preacher in this place no longer needs courage to be sincere, for he knows that your faith accords with the word he delivers; he knows that your Majesty understands and adopts the noble maxim of the Wise Man of our Sacred Books. ‘The patient man is better than the valiant, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh strong cities.’ In this interior personal sway which

the Sovereign exercises over himself, the highest dignity and characteristic of power are found. Men sound his just praises, and God rewards him, not with a crown which passes away, but with one that remains for eternity."

Another time, F. de Ravignan called suddenly to mind the example of Bossuet, and remembered the great lesson which he taught in the opening of one of his Funeral Orations. The Emperor Napoleon was at the camp at Boulogne-sur-Mer; the telegraph had just brought the news of the death of the Czar Nicholas; the Empress was alone in the private compartment in front of the pulpit. The orator introduced the following apt digression:—

"And is it not in the book of faith that we must also read the great acts of the providential government of the world? When that God on whom empires depend, and Who alone gives kings their power or withdraws it, as He alone gives or withdraws life—when God strikes one of those unlooked for blows which carry off some mighty potentate, and make him be seen no more on the stage of the world, does He not tell us loudly that all the thoughts of men are vain, that their existence is frail, and that He alone is the Almighty, the Unconquered and Eternal. Your Majesty has learned to read the divine decrees in this book of faith, but far better in your own case. You have seen yourself raised by the Lord of heaven and earth to the first place next to the throne of a mighty empire that you might have the power to spread abroad the blessings and the graces of charity. Madam, you have well understood this noble mission; may it always be in God's sight your highest title, your most glorious dignity!"

F. de Ravignan was naturally punctual, so that we are not surprised that he observed it in the region of the Court, where exactitude is called the

politeness of princess. However, his precision was so great as to deserve remark. He had a watch with a large face placed near him on the pulpit, and he regulated the course of his extempore address so well that word died away on his lips as the minute-hand completed half a revolution. He allowed himself no exception, except for the Passion sermon, on the evening of Good Friday; on this occasion he sought leave, and he received his answer from the Grand Chamberlain, the Duke de Bassano: "The Emperor says that he has felt too much interest in listening to your eloquent discourses not to leave you all the latitude that may be convenient."

At the usual audience, which succeeds the last discourse on Easter Monday, the preacher of the station received the warmest assurances of esteem and perfect satisfaction. The Emperor was the first to mention, and speak with interest of the Church of Jesus, the building of which had been begun near our house in the Rue de Sèvres, and offered, unasked, to contribute his share. Then he rose and went to fetch a magnificent chalice with cruets to match, which he presented in his own name and that of the Empress, that a daily memento might be made of them at the altar. F. de Ravignan thanked the august donors; and on returning home, he found that the imperial present had been sent before, and was awaiting him.

It must be understood that this apostolic man, whose humility was surpassed only by his zeal for the greater glory of God, had not accepted the honour of preaching at the Tuileries without great repugnance. He felt alarm at so conspicuous a function, and he would have preferred to have employed the remains of his voice and strength in preaching simple retreats rather than set discourses.

An order was needed to calm his misgivings, and to impose on him as a sacrifice what another perhaps would have coveted. He wrote to his Superior on this subject: "Blessings on your kind, sweet words! You were inspired with them by our common Master for the comfort of my poor soul. I cannot say that it is perfectly at ease: my will is so, I think, by the grace of our Lord. Yes, you are right: there is nothing but the annihilation and destruction of self that can make us advance in the Spirit of our blessed Father. I cannot yet pray with a feeling of having made a complete sacrifice. I stop a little short, and am waiting on the border of the sea; sooner or later I must plunge in. Pray earnestly, that I may be a worthy child of St Ignatius and of the cross. Farewell, thanks with all my heart!"

F. de Ravignan found consolation nowhere but in the idea of combining two ministrations at the same time; the most brilliant and the most humble; the one much extolled among men, the other known only to God. He went to his Superior and begged as a favour that, to lighten his sacrifice, he might be allowed to give a second station to counterbalance the first: he would preach alternately, on the Sunday at the Tuileries, and during the week at the house of the Little Sisters of the Poor in the Rue Saint-Jacques; "but," he added, "do not let any one know anything about it, either out of doors or even in the house, for if you do all will be lost." Obedience had put on him a heavy trial; he now had the consolation he desired. The poor old people had no idea that they had the Cathedral and Court preacher at their service, and although he went to considerable expense for their benefit, yet they treated him with but little respect. F. de Ravignan made a remark upon it full of the greatest humility, and simplicity: "If I had been

tempted to vain glory, I should have been brought to a sense of the truth by my station at the Rue Saint-Jacques, where I fail completely. As soon as I open my mouth, all the good old people set about coughing and spitting, as if at a given signal. I try to succeed, I do my very best, I vary my tone, I attend to gesticulation : it is all to no good. It often happens that my voice is drowned by all this noise, and I spend all my eloquence without any return ; and this shows me that people listen to me in other places only for the sake of appearances, because it is the fashion."

The orator called to mind one of the rules of preachers of the Society of Jesus, in which it is said : " Let all devote themselves with no less zeal to teaching Christian doctrine to children and the ignorant " : a life-giving apostolate, which has been valued in our society from the beginning. In like manner, to bring himself into conformity with the spirit of the Institute, the orator had left the pulpit of Nôtre-Dame some years before, during the period of his Conferences, and sought out the orphanage of St Nicholas, founded by Mgr. de Bervanger ; and the sublime lessons he gave in Christian philosophy were succeeded by teaching Catechism to mere children of the people. In this place, no less than in the Rue Saint-Jacques, the humble act of the Apostle was shrouded in mystery. One day, however, a few friends were informed, and the chapel was not large enough to contain the hearers. F. de Ravignan's humility had been betrayed. The preacher was less fortunate here than at the station given at the house of the Little Sisters of the Poor ; this set-off against all the glory he received remained wholly unsuspected ; and posterity will doubtless consider him greater in the lowly pulpit of the chapel in the Rue Saint-Jacques, than in the chapel of kings and emperors.

F. de Ravignan's love for the work of the Apostle of Children reminds me of one of his bursts of eloquence which seems to me very proper to show the aptness and power of his improvisation. One day in the month of May, he was taking part in the ceremony of a First Communion at the chapel of the Nuns of the Sacred Heart in the Rue de Varennes. He was in the pulpit giving an exhortation before the Consecration to our Blessed Lady, when the sky became suddenly clouded, a storm burst upon the slight dome, the sanctuary became dark as night, except around the twenty-five First Communicants, whose lighted tapers gave brightness to a portion of the chapel, where they were seen full of peace and recollection. A peal of thunder was heard ; the orator paused, listened for a moment, threw a glance full of love on his little innocent group, and let fall these words of peace : " You hear the storm, my children ; it is an image of life with its dangers, its anguish, its terrors ; yes, and its darkness. We need a refuge : fly to Mary, hide yourselves under her mantle. Just now, what do you fear ? Nothing ; for she carries you on her breast as beloved children. To prove this, I appeal to my experience with souls ; when a heart has received from heaven this precious gift of flying to our Blessed Lady in troubles, trials, and struggles, that heart has peace, it is blessed and saved. The course of a soul which trusts in our Lady is ever the freest, the straightest, and the most secure. My dear children, do not forget it, and may the mantle of your Mother be your shelter in the day of tempest ; a day which I would fain keep far from you, but which will sooner or later come. Then, as now, your heart will be calm even under a tempestuous sky."

We see, then, that F. de Ravignan's mission was not confined to the great ones of the world ; it was

no less devoted to the poor and humble. It is true that Heaven seems to have destined him more particularly for the former class, but in heart he always inclined towards the latter. This must be clearly understood if we would avoid misapprehending the character and the sanctity of his zeal; an error into which it is easy to fall in the case of one to whom, both in his room and in the pulpit, Providence drew the most illustrious persons. He was the brother in religion of Bourdaloue, and he preached to the learned and to princes; but he was also brother to the Blessed Peter Claver, and we saw in a former chapter how happy he was when a negro child knocked at his room-door; he devoted entire hours to teaching him his catechism.

One day, he came to the Convent of the Sacred Heart full of joy, leading by the hand a child of ten years old. "Give me the baptismal water," he said; "here is a little Protestant that wants to become a Catholic." It was the son of a groom. F. de Ravignan trained his little neophyte with truly fatherly tenderness, found time to instruct him himself, and prepared him for his First Communion.





CHAPTER XXIV.

DEALINGS WITH PROTESTANTS.

Method followed by F. de Ravignan in Instructing and Converting Protestants—His Charity, Prudent Forbearance, Vigour in Opposing Difficulties—Various Examples.



DE RAVIGNAN had converted a considerable number of schismatics and heretics, both natives of France and foreigners, in the earlier part of his apostolic career; but these returns to Catholic unity, in which he was instrumental, succeeded each other only at somewhat distant intervals. But during the latter years of his life, England and Germany sent him noble-hearted recruits, chosen souls, sometimes whole families together; the stream was unbroken, and this new ministry, like all his others, called for organisation, regulations for its exercise, the assignment of a time and place. Thenceforward the religious set apart one day in the week exclusively for Protestants: he appointed to meet them every Tuesday at the Sacred Heart in the Rue de Varennes.

The station in London, which brought so little consolation at the time, will be remembered. After having sown in sadness, the evangelical

labourer was destined to reap in joy. F. de Ravignan excluded no men from his zeal, but yet he sometimes showed a sort of apostolic predilection for England, not indeed for the policy of its government, but for the character of its people. He called it the practical land of good sense, the renowned land where God displayed so much of His power, and inspired of old such generous acts of devotion. "Oh, that it would please the Lord to enlighten this great nation!" he would often exclaim: "why are you, my worthy Brothers, why are you separated from your Brothers in Jesus Christ?"

Let us study the method usually followed by F. de Ravignan in effecting this pious transformation. It is hard to say whether it is more difficult to bring a soul to the practice of virtue or to belief in truth. But at least the priest can meet the bad Catholic on common ground, can show that he is living in contradiction with himself and his own principles, can appeal in proof to his faith, and can find an ally in his conscience. But how can a Protestant be reached, who is separated from the Church by his early education, is consistent with himself, surrounded by a thousand prejudices, and entrenched in his good faith? Moreover, there is almost always external opposition and internal anguish: after a series of doubts and anxieties, there comes a final hour of distress, when the person is no longer a Protestant, but is not yet a Catholic: and it is only after passing through this interval that rest is found in the bosom of that truth which sets us free.

"I know," said F. de Ravignan, "I know how much is suffered by a soul wearied in the search after certainty in religion. The state of that soul is painful which is fighting against the habits derived from childhood, from country, and from education.

I confess that there cannot be a severer trial; and if there be a state of suffering in the world, it is in this position." From this conviction sprang his indulgence and compassion, his immense interest in all who were making this terrible passage from darkness to light. He felt that they had more need of encouragement than of instruction, and he was unceasing in recommending them to seek grace and strength by prayer, and in promising them peace after the struggle.

"I bless God," he would say to them, "that He has allowed me to meet in this land of sorrow a heart so worthy of Him, a soul so elevated and so well fitted for all that is great and generous. The thought and remembrance of you is always before me. I am deeply touched by your confidence, and feel myself unworthy of it. I feel that I am unable to correspond to it as I ought; but I value and delight in it so much, that I venture to ask you to continue it. God is the witness of the depth of interest I feel in the destiny of your soul. How glad I should be if you were happy—if I learned that peace had returned to your mind and heart! This rest so much to be desired is found in the possession of truth. Would that I were a minister of our Lord more worthy of you more able to point out to you the decisive and striking characters of the Church of Jesus Christ!

"Difficulties and obstacles are met with, no doubt; the passage is painful, and I take the profoundest interest in your anxieties. But our good God Whose servants we are will not allow us to seek in vain; He will lead you to find in prayer the rest of which you have need. The question is so grave, so closely connected with a whole eternity hereafter, that it calls for a courage and mind like yours. Your conscience and heart, with the aid of God's grace, will accomplish everything.

"That is a happy moment when we feel that the object is attained, that we have come to the end of our search, that all our doubts have disappeared. The very pains which you are now enduring have been felt by more than one soul which has at last found repose in the bosom of Catholic truth. Prayer is the road to heaven: God cannot fail to hear you; you so clearly have all the signs of being under His protection! Take courage in your noble work! Whether far from you or near, I am closely united with you."

F. de Ravignan's prudence was as marked as his zeal was ardent: he allowed a moderate delay with the utmost readiness, especially when the motive was some situation of delicacy or some remnants of uncertainty. "I shall never wish to hurry you on to any precipitate step," he said once to a person who was undergoing trial in both those ways: "it is quite true, the business is serious. The question deserves such careful examination, it bears so closely on our sacred and immortal destiny, that a man of thought, a person of upright mind, can find no better employment for his generous energy. You understand this, and I am glad of it. I earnestly beg our Lord to enlighten you, and I have confidence in Him and in you.

"But I see very well that you stand in less need of reasons than of favourable circumstances. Let us then join in begging God not to allow you to suffer injury by your delay: to be pleased to bring about a suitable day and hour. I know the full difficulty of your position, I know the need of great prudence in your conduct.

"But God is perfectly good: He has sent much of His grace to prepare your way. He has often spoken to your heart. If He displays all the marks of His fatherly authority, if He call on us to surrender and follow Him, will He not

give all the necessary means and helps? Will He abandon us? In recompense for a few instants of pain, of anguish, and sacrifice, He will give us a hundred-fold in interior strength and consolation. St Paul, following the teaching of our divine Saviour, tells that to live in piety, to live a true life, we must suffer. This is the price to purchase heaven with. But what happiness there is in sacrificing ourselves for God Himself! Jesus Christ on the cross gives us an example. Let us be constant in prayer and in our search."

Whenever F. de Ravignan perceived that there was no longer any reasonable ground for delay, but that it arose from the natural cowardice which would willingly draw back at the very hour of adherence, he came to the aid of the failing will, and lent all the energy of his own will for its support: he remembered the counsel of the Gospel, and forced and compelled the timid soul to come into the fold where there is no room for fear. An American lady, who was to have been received into the bosom of the Catholic Church on the morrow, wrote to him on December 30, 1856:—"I have given up the idea of seeing you to-morrow. I have put off my abjuration till my return. I am obliged to leave Paris on the 2d of January." F. de Ravignan knew how far he could go, and answered without ceremony:—"You will come to the Chapel of the Sacred Heart to-morrow to make your Confession; and on the 1st of January 1857, you will receive holy Baptism and the holy Eucharist at the Mass which I shall say at seven o'clock. May the faith give you more and more light! All is well: be calm." The timid Protestant regained courage, came on the day appointed, and went home a happy Catholic; and then, with a mother's zeal, she herself brought to F. de Ravignan her five children, by whom she hoped to be surrounded in the Church and in heaven.

After having in this manner urged the fulfilment of God's will, F. de Ravignan continued to join prudence to energy in supporting the new converts amid the difficulties and troubles which often arose. A lady of high birth, a Russian, and a Protestant, had been brought by his care into Catholic unity ; but reasons of prudence had caused the abjuration to be kept secret for some time. As soon as the husband found it out, in the first movement of his anger, he hastened to the Rue de Sèvres, to express his resentment against the hypocritical Jesuit, to whom the perversion, as he called it, of his wife was due. He was checked at first when he found the man of God in his humble room, waiting for him with all the peace of a heart void of reproach. But his passion soon got the upper hand, and after a few moments' silence, he began a torrent of invective, mingled with threats. F. de Ravignan listened without showing any emotion. This unlooked-for calm enraged him still more, and the stranger passed on from personal insults to violent attacks against the Society. But on this, the religious rose, and exclaimed vehemently, "Sir, you may say what you please about myself, but never about my Mother, the Society!" He continued in a strain of warm apology for the Order to which he had the happiness of belonging, insomuch that his antagonist, astounded at this sudden change, and overthrown by the torrent of heart-felt eloquence, retired muttering, "What an extraordinary man!" Though disarmed in this manner, the husband took his revenge, and forbade the new convert to have any intercourse with the Jesuit. It was a hard sacrifice, to which she could not resign herself ; and at an interview, when she met her director at the house of a pious friend, she spoke warmly of her resolution to disobey secretly. But the interests of her soul did not require this course,

and, in the mind of F. de Ravignan, this was the limit at which prudence regained its rights; the answer was dictated by prudence: "No, under the circumstances, you ought to obey your husband, and you will find some priest more holy than myself for your director."

To prepare a soul to receive light and virtue from on high, F. de Ravignan acted on the intellect as well as on the will. He neglected nothing to ensure that the convert should receive that sound instruction from which springs deep conviction, the pledge of a durable conversion; but he avoided all barren arguments, put aside all minute objections and difficulties, and reduced the question to the simplest point, the *fact* of the separation.

"You will bear in mind," he said, "that for a long time there was but one Church; there were partial and temporary schisms, but she always remained unchangeably the same. From the days of Jesus Christ and of St Peter downwards, we have preserved the divine mark of unity; others have separated from us; we have never separated from any. And at the hour of death we feel no disquiet as to the truth of our Church.

"Jesus Christ ordained that the Church should be manifestly one: it was to be a *House*, a *City*, a *Fold*; *one Flock and one Shepherd*; Peter was the appointed foundation. Where is this plan of our Saviour seen to be fulfilled? Answer me.

"I believe that to look at the matter this way simplifies the examination, and sets us on the right road to truth. For if once we discover the centre of unity, the keeper of the deposit of revealed truth, the marks of the spouse of Jesus Christ, then nothing is left but to lend the ear and open the heart to listen; nothing but to love and to obey."

F. de Ravignan took the greatest pains not to wound those whom he wished to convert; he was

tender in his treatment of early distrust, and of the susceptibility arising from prejudice: he was far from availing himself of the goodness of his cause to put on an air of victory; he introduced himself simply and with modesty, and in his mouth truth seemed even retiring. "I am not arguing," he would say; "I am merely laying these doubts before you; I lay them before your mind and heart, considerations which may raise doubt in you, but which raise none in me. Weigh them well, calmly, and with prayer. Consider the questions I put as the words of a respectful and devoted friend."

If, in spite of all his precautions, he noticed any symptoms of his having ruffled a sensitive soul, he at once condescended to make excuses: "Why have you ceased to write to me, you whom I esteem and revere, and for whom, if you will allow me to say it, I have a deep affection? Was there anything to give you pain in my last letters, which remained unanswered? I beg your pardon—pardon with all my heart and soul. You cannot refuse to grant me pardon. We were talking together on eternal truths—on the search after the faith and the true Church; why should we leave off? Your lofty intellect and noble heart are well fitted for these thoughts and desires. And then, doubt is so painful; for God has formed us for certainty, peace, and light."

He not only kept up an affectionate remembrance of his proselytes, but he exerted himself to keep intimacy with them even at a distance. We may give a specimen of the style in which he addressed them: "My dear Child, I am filled with joy at your faith and zeal. How I value the remembrance of the hour when grace triumphed in your mind over all obstacles! I say in your mind; for your heart was upright and generous,

and had long before yielded to the truth. You have a real mission to carry out in society and your family ; you will always be accompanied by my wishes and prayers. You will be good enough to write to me occasionally. My dear Child, I do not want to exact what would be a burden to your soul ; but yet I do desire to maintain the pious intercourse which God has established between us. May you enjoy God's choicest blessings ! I feel the emotion of a father when I recall to mind the proofs of confidence you have given me. Do not forget me."

It would be difficult to mention with precision the exact number of conversions of Protestants effected by F. de Ravignan. From the allusions found here and there in his letters, we get a mean of thirty or forty a year. Thus, on the 20th of May 1856, he wrote : "Speaking for myself, I have received twenty-five abjurations since October." On the 25th of January 1857 : "Since October we have received fifteen or sixteen abjurations. These are miracles of grace, calling on us to bless the power and goodness of God. Let us take courage, and be constant in labour and prayer."

Having explained the method followed by F. de Ravignan in this peculiar ministry, we will relate only one case, the somewhat complicated circumstances of which seem to us very suitable to bring into view the strong character of the man of God, his zeal, sweetness, and energy.

He once met at Versailles a young English Protestant lady of very good family. He dropped a few passing words on the importance of salvation, which did not fall on an ungrateful soil. From that time, the lady began to have doubts ; and to obtain a reliable solution, she set herself to study the Catholic religion for a whole year together, read much, and prayed yet more. In this

way her heart was converted as soon as her mind was convinced ; and she no longer thought of anything but of the means of entering the true Church.

F. de Ravignan was informed of her resolution ; but he foresaw the opposition which would impede her movements, and he advised her to make a secret abjuration ; and then, at some suitable opportunity, to inform her family that she had taken the step, never to be retraced. The courageous girl preferred to begin by herself declaring her intention to her family. At the first mention of it, her mother fainted, and remained for several days in her bed, with convulsions alternating with loss of consciousness. Meantime the daring girl was surrounded and beset by her father and three younger sisters, and loaded with reproaches : she would lose her soul, kill her mother, dishonour her family ; and as she persisted in her design, they refused any longer to see or speak with her. Her father locked her up in a room, and forbade every one in the house to have any communication with the prisoner ; at the same time, the mother summoned her three other children to her bedside, and made them kneel and swear before God that they would never imitate her miserable example.

When F. de Ravignan heard of this persecution, he thought nothing of a few affronts, but instantly left Paris for Versailles, went straight to the house, presented himself before the head of the family, and after the usual civilities, asked him what he was going to do. "For my part," answered the other, "I will never give my consent ; but I know that my daughter is in fact her own mistress ; she is of age, and can do as she likes. I ask only for a delay of a week. During this interval, we will do all we can to dissuade her ; if, after this time, she still persists, I abandon her to her fate."

The terms were accepted, and for a whole week long the young lady was left alone in her prison, or was exposed to attacks of every kind. Two Protestant ministers were sent in to her, and added their remonstrances to the persuasions of her family ; but the constancy of the young lady was proof against all their efforts. The leader of these important allies, on coming away from a last interview, folded his hands tightly together, and then, as if he were making a useless effort to separate them, said, "The perverse girl holds to her point like this. It is a spirit of contradiction. The more her defences are shaken the more obstinate is her resistance ; we must give up all hope." During this critical week, the poor prisoner had at least the happiness of contriving to send news of her state ; her window looked out over a garden, and she secretly threw out notes for F. de Ravignan ; and a friendly hand was there to receive them, and forward them to the address. At length the week passed by, but the promised liberty was not granted. F. de Ravignan was forced to interfere. After saying mass for the success of the step he was about to take, he returned to Versailles, and asked to see the master of the house. The porter at the house-door, in obedience to orders, apologised, but refused him entry. The priest forced his way, mounted the staircase, and knocked at the door of the apartments of the family. Here he met the same reception. As soon as the servant who opened the door caught sight of a soutane, she at once tried to shut the door. The Jesuit hindered her doing so, and offering his card, proceeded to cross the threshold. "You must not come in," she said. He answered that he would enter, and he did so.

The noise caused by this strange altercation reached the prisoner's room. Terrified at the

thought of the scene that was preparing for her, she ran forward to meet F. de Ravignan: "Excuse me, Father," she said, "I cannot receive you."

"My child, you will receive me," was his calm answer; but, in her fright, she had already disappeared.

Meantime a confused sound of voices was heard in the room next to the passage in which the religious was waiting, where deliberation was going on as to the course to be pursued. It was clear that they had to do with a man who would not yield a single point. It was resolved to bring him into the room, face to face with the trembling girl. Nature, not will, had for a moment faltered in her; he reassured her, and restored her self-mastery. Before long, her father came into the room: "Sir," said F. de Ravignan, "I beg you to allow your daughter to come immediately to the nearest chapel, where I can have some conversation with her." "I cannot make any opposition, if it is her wish," was the answer. "You are then free, my child," replied the religious; "go, and I will follow you." She obeyed, and that same day the Catholic Church numbered one child the more.

Her conversion did not put an end to her trials; the young Catholic was soon sent away; and whether the object was to prevent her exercising any religious influence over her sisters, or to place her herself in a Protestant atmosphere, she was sent alone to England. But it would not have been right that more zeal should be shown for error than for truth. F. de Ravignan's charity did not grow weary, but went along with the banished girl; he never omitted writing to her a single day. Persecution produced a very different effect from what had been foreseen by the family; the convert was not content with being a Catholic, but determined, moreover, to become a religious; and at

the present moment, in the freedom given by her faith, and in her love of God, she finds a peace which the world was unwilling to allow her, and which it cannot take away.

This first conversion soon brought on another. F. de Ravignan's apostolic incursion had drawn attention on the English family. An officer of the Imperial Guard, in garrison at Versailles, asked in marriage the hand of the elder of the three sisters of the young nun. But there was a condition attached to this union, which seemed to render it impossible. The Catholic wished that the conversion of the lady should precede the marriage; the Protestant, who had thoughts of embracing the true faith, claimed that the marriage should first be celebrated. The young lady was not without an honourable motive for wishing to delay her abjuration. She knew perfectly well that she was no way bound by the oath which she had taken in her mother's presence; but a feeling of delicacy made her wish to avoid the appearance of yielding, on a question of conscience, to mere affection or to considerations of interest. Her change of religion would pass in the world for nothing but careless compliance, and would do no honour to Catholicity.

A blow from heaven cut short the difficulty. The officer, nearly giving up all hope, had recourse to the Blessed Virgin. At first he formed a plan to make a pilgrimage on foot to our Lady of Chartres; but the long absence necessary for carrying out his design in every point was inconsistent with his professional duty, and he availed himself of the railway, but, out of humility, chose the lowest class of carriage. In the company of two of his brothers, the one a magistrate, the other still only a student of the law, he received Communion in the ancient shrine of the Virgin Mother.

On returning to Versailles, he was trying a new horse on the plain of Satory, when the spirited animal took the bit between his teeth, ran beyond the exercise-ground, and rushed across the forest. In its furious course, it was on the point of dashing itself against a wall which barred its progress, when the rider bethought him of our Lady of Chartres, and invoked her assistance in his danger. That same instant the horse stopped; cowered down rather than fell. It was subdued. The officer hastened to tell the young lady of the danger he had run, and the miracle which had enabled him to see her again. She was deeply moved, and being at the same time touched by grace, she exclaimed, "It is enough! it is enough! I will be a Catholic!" Her resolve was quickly carried out: one of the three brothers, the magistrate, remained with the neophyte, to conduct her to the chapel where the ceremony was to take place; the two others hurried off by the railway, and reached Paris; and, an hour afterwards, they again reached Versailles, with one of F. de Ravignan's religious brethren, who received her abjuration that very day.

Some months afterwards, and after the death of F. de Ravignan, the officer of the guard, who had become an aide-de-camp, wrote a letter full of the charm of pious simplicity, to the Superior of our house in the Rue de Sèvres. "My Dear Father,—A son was born to me on Friday, December 3, at three o'clock, the feast-day of St Francis Xavier, and of our revered F. de Ravignan. I had hoped that he would have been born about the 8th, and I had a novena of Masses said for the intention, that, if it were God's will, the birth might be on the very day of the Immaculate Conception. I felt a little disappointed that the child was born before the 8th; but I was consoling myself with the

thought, that a Friday at three o'clock was itself a very good time to come into the world, when my sister at Conflans wrote to say how glad she was that her nephew was born on the day of the Patron Saint of our good F. de Ravignan. May that good Father give him his protection, and make him a good Christian ! If the child shall hereafter wish to become a Jesuit or a priest, I shall be glad of it ; to have the eldest son a priest is the greatest happiness that can befall a family. Perhaps, my dear Father, you may think these are rather odd ideas ; but F. de Ravignan did everything for us on this earth."

We cannot conclude this chapter without making some mention of that well-known American *Medium*, who possessed the unfortunate talent of turning other things besides tables, and of calling up the dead for the amusement of the living. Much has been said, even in the newspapers, about his close and pious intimacy with F. de Ravignan ; and it seems that an attempt has been made to use an honoured name as a passport to introduce into France, and establish there, these wonderful discoveries of the New World.

The facts, in all their simplicity, are as follows : It is quite true that after the young foreigner had been converted in Italy, he was furnished at Rome with an introduction to F. de Ravignan ; but by this time he had given up his magic at the same time that he gave up his Protestantism, and he was received with the interest which is due from a priest to every soul ransomed with the blood of Jesus Christ, and especially, perhaps, to a soul which is converted and brought back to the bosom of the Church. On his arrival in Paris, he was again absolutely forbidden to return in any way to his old practices. F. de Ravignan, agreeably

to the principles of the faith which proscribe all superstition, prohibited, under the severest penalties he could inflict, all participation in, or presence at these dangerous, and sometimes guilty proceedings. Once the unhappy *Medium*, beset by I know not what man or devil, was unfaithful to his promise; he was received with a severity which prostrated him; I chanced at the time to come into the room, and I saw him rolling on the ground, and writhing like a worm at the feet of the priest, so righteously indignant. The Father was touched by a repentance which led to such bodily agony, raised him up, and pardoned him; but, before dismissing him, exacted a written promise confirmed by an oath. But a notorious relapse soon took place, and the servant of God, breaking off all connection with this slave of the Spirits, sent him word never again to appear in his presence.





CHAPTER XXV.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES.

The Sacred Heart—The Visitation—The Carmelites.

 HE ministrations of F. de Ravignan in religious communities attained a greater and greater development in his latter years. This might be anticipated: the strenuous labourer was untiring in toil as long as he lived; and when his strength no longer responded to his courage, he ceased to labour at clearing the forest of the world, and took in hand the cultivation of the garden of the Church. This change of work seemed to have been indicated by Providence itself, and it suited well with the inclinations of his soul. Towards the end of his pilgrimage here below, he was led by a pious and secret instinct towards this earthly paradise, the vestibule of heaven; and in it he felt himself in his own domain, farther from men, and nearer to God. But his real joy was, that there, more than elsewhere, he met souls enamoured of perfection, and, according to his judgment, far better than his own; and he went thither like a scholar attending a school of virtue, to gain, as he said, conversion or confusion. And lastly, it was, in his opinion, the

duty of a priest to spend himself upon these hearts so detached from all things, who imitate Jesus Christ by the sacrifice of themselves, and a single one of whom does more for God's service than a hundred hearts of the common sort.

F. de Ravignan felt a particular attachment to the religious families of St Teresa and of St Francis of Sales. But he found an object which attracted still more of his interest in another religious congregation of more recent origin ; he was called on to assist its fortunate beginnings, to give stability to its immense development ; and we may believe that after all the various services rendered by him to the Church, after he had passed through so many different careers in life, and maintained so many struggles on behalf of the Society, he had yet another providential mission to perform in the blessed influence exercised by him over the Society of the Sacred Heart.

F. de Ravignan began this new ministry at the Noviciate at Conflans, on the 1st of November 1852, as if he were destined to devote all the remainder of his life to the labour on which his earliest return of health was employed. In 1853 he wrote from Rome to his Superior in Paris : " With your approval, the Retreat at Conflans will give me rest, both of soul and body, after the labours of the General Congregation ;" and in another letter he said, " You know that I am always glad to go to Conflans ; and there is, I think, profit on both sides. The little I can do is quite enough at that dear house ; and I have the guidance of the Book of the Exercises. When he passed the summer in Alsace, the same zeal to lead souls to perfection took him to the Noviciate at Kintzheim.

His mere presence in the house at once made one of the days of the religious family pass the

better. But he came to look for work, not for holiday, and from the minute he arrived to the time he left, his labour was incessant. Each visit produced at least an exhortation to the community. Often as he had given them their Retreat and *Triduum*; often as he had preached at the ceremony of giving the habit or at a profession; after so many instructions of every kind, and on every subject, he was not exhausted, and his hearers always found novelty in him. All the rest of his time was spent in hearing Confessions or in giving spiritual direction. To him, after God, many of these souls owed all they had; some their conversion to the Catholic faith, others their vocation, and so he finished the sketch he had begun by leading them in the road to perfection. He occupied himself exclusively with his spiritual task, never going beyond his priestly duties, and he did not meddle with any of the temporal interests of the community. Never ceasing to be their Father, yet always remaining their Master, he despatched the Confessions and spiritual conversations with great rapidity, cutting short all useless prolixity, with the view of encouraging nothing but solid sturdy virtue, none but liberal and generous devotions. Notice was attracted by the correctness of the judgment he passed, as often as he was called on to pronounce for or against the admission of any subject upon whose fitness there was a doubt. The event was commonly not slow in verifying his decision.

Towards the close of his life, it came into his mind to give perpetuity to his teaching in the Noviciates of the Sacred Heart, by bequeathing to them the knowledge, and, as we may say, the key, of the treasure-house from which he himself was wont to gather all his spiritual science. We have already often remarked that this treasure-house

was the Book of the Exercises of St Ignatius. He had hitherto confined himself in his retreats to bringing souls under the influence of the Book, but latterly he imparted the knowledge of it. A few persons on whom Heaven seemed to have bestowed a particular aptitude for understanding this compendium of the rules of Christian perfection, were selected as pupils in his school, and long hours were employed in explaining its secrets to them. He did still more; he set about and finished a complete commentary on the methods of St Ignatius, by which he enabled women to take a share in the apostolic use of the Exercises, a labour which had already been begun, not without a blessing from Heaven, by the nuns of the Retreat, who were brought into existence for this very work close to the tomb of St Francis Regis.

One of these religious ladies, who had been initiated in the methods of St Ignatius, wrote from Paris to F. de Ravignan that she was going to make her retreat all alone, apart from the community retreat, and using the Book of the Exercises. His answer is dated from Saint-Acheul, where he was at the time:—

“I really congratulate you, from the bottom of my heart, on this retreat in perfect *solitude*.

“Your first book will be the *Tabernacle*: in it you will read with liberty and constancy, and you will leave the care of giving you your retreat to the Sacred Heart of our Lord, so far as He may be pleased to give it.

“You will find it also very useful to use the plain text of St Ignatius, in the translation by F. Jennesseaux, my neighbour in my room here. This book is a sealed book to most minds. It unfolds itself to *a very small number*. Thirty years of attentive study are not enough to make it known; a special gift from God is needed.

Very few people, too, know how to make use of it; and, in fact, many souls would not have strength to bear its gentle, simple, terse force. However, I am quite confident that you will *open this holy book* with profit, that you will taste its sweetness, and that it will benefit you.

“Read, then, the plain text of St Ignatius day by day, hour by hour. The notes added by F. Roothaan are excellent, but are not always necessary; do not consider yourself obliged to read them all. This remark applies also to the short observations which F. Jennesseaux has inserted here and there.

“Quietly read each part of the text which corresponds to the actual day and hour, with simplicity, liberty, and repose of heart; then, if you find these holy words enough, if they strike your mind, or if our Lord supplies by His inspirations the place of any book, give way to this God-sent influence of grace as long as it lasts. This is a law contained in the Book of the Exercises itself.

“So I find I must this time give up all thoughts of my summer retreat, (his last illness was just beginning;) if I say a word about it, I foresee there will be a general cry of ‘Away with him!’ and we must keep clear of that.”

It has been said of St Francis of Sales that he was at once the most indulgent of saints and the foremost to insist on self-denial; that he guided souls to walk by the way of peace and of sacrifice through love. F. de Ravignan, like him, made wide the hearts of his penitents, in order to stir them to generosity. He did not seek to disguise the cross from religious souls, deeming himself entitled to demand much in the name of the Lord from those who had given themselves to Him. His first step was to set them free from those troubles which are, to say the least, mere weak-

nesses, results of a diseased imagination or of an unfortunate character, and which suck up the invigorating sap of the will. Trials such as these are neither sent by God nor rewarded by Him. When the ground was clear, he planted the true tree of the cross: "Accept everything," he would then say; "do more, love everything;" or sometimes, "Make gold out of everything." When the opportunity came to win a signal victory, when Providence sent some trouble to be endured, or when some course of voluntary humiliation was to be adopted, he tried nature to the uttermost in order to crush self-love at the feet of Jesus Christ, covered with humiliation, and crucified for us. A certain nun had been suffering for two years together the greatest affliction that can befall us; all the consolation and direction she received was, "Be silent, rejoice, and leave the truth to deliver you when the time comes." The time did come, and the truth delivered her; but it was not till after five years of martyrdom and of silence.

Let us see what F. de Ravignan was accustomed to say to novices on the subject of over-frequent communication with their families. It is a hard saying, but was the word of the Master so very easy to bear? "How thoroughly," he cried, "I see the truth of what our Lord teaches! A person who wishes to live the true life, to be devoted in imitation of Jesus Christ, and to save souls, meets with opposition: from what quarter does the most violent opposition come? From the person's family, sometimes even where the greatest piety prevails. If you have had the courage to break through everything, and beat down every impediment in the way of your making the most excellent gifts your own, what questions do even the most religious of your relations put to you? Do they ask whether you love prayer, whether you

practise penance, whether you observe the holy Rule, whether you devote and sacrifice yourself to promote the glory of God and the salvation of your neighbour? No; their questions are not upon these subjects; they are afraid of them. They ask such important questions as these: Is your appetite good? Do you sleep well? Do you take exercise? Are you thought much of? Are your sacrifices appreciated? Oh Lord, pardon them! Surely they know not what they do nor what they say."

We have been furnished with a sheet of paper written from F. de Ravignan's dictation, and bearing a strange title: it is a *Code for Religious Detachment*. We will quote it as an example of the perfect detachment which he demanded of such persons as were capable of it; but we must not be understood to advise its rigorous application to every soul. In the Church, and especially in cloisters, there will always be found, thank God, some hearts enamoured of the Cross, whose only joy is in patience, contempt, and privation. On perusing these lines, the world will perhaps find many things which to its view are trifling; but let it try to practise them, and I venture to say that it will soon find them no small burden. The Code is divided into four articles.

"First, the Heart.—Accustom the heart never to seek for support or consolation in attachment to any person, however holy the attachment may be and agreeable to the Rule; but be satisfied with such intercourse as arises from sincere charity and perfect obedience: seek no relaxation except what the community life affords, nor anywhere but with our Lord in the holy Tabernacle; remembering that if a nun yields nothing to nature, she will find plenty of time every day for holy prayer, however fully she may be employed.

“Secondly, Health.—Observe the letter of the Rule; and therefore, in little passing ailments, be silent, and seek neither relief, nor remedy, nor rest, unless the violence of the suffering leaves no room for doubt. When once you have come under the obedience of the Infirmarian, receive, in the spirit of a poor person, whatever she has the charity to offer.

“Thirdly, Food and Clothing.—Never complain either of persons or things. At the common table, if you find a dish does not agree with you, you need not take it; but you must not supply its place by another of greater delicacy. In general, have a horror of whatever separates you, or gives you any exemption or distinction from the common life. Never look out for nor obtain any favour, and wait in silence for such as charity and the Rule allow. Try to reach the point of bearing even being forgotten, provided there is no danger of serious sickness resulting. Always avoid making requests and complaints, hoping to receive a dispensation by way of order, and not merely of permission.

“Fourthly, Poverty.—Be very much on your watch against the luxury and comfort which the pupils and persons of the world bring into the house along with them; never speak with approval of their trumpery, their trinkets, and their new inventions; do not even look at them with curiosity, and let nothing of the sort find its way into the ordinary religious life. Our kingdom is not of this world. Remain poor, abject, in the presence of a world the spirit and the usages of which we should despise.

“A religious who is faithful to these rules, will find all things in our Lord imprisoned in the Tabernacle; health, relief, warmth, coolness, rest, diversion; and, moreover, peace, joy, friendship;

and if she do not receive these consolations, which, after all, belong to sense, she will find what is better, our Lord Himself in the sacrifice of sense, a sacrifice which is nothing different from real Religious Detachment."

At the bottom of the page, F. de Ravignan wrote with his own hand the words, "*Fiat! Amen!* Be faithful, simple. Shun using a multitude of words with God, with your neighbour, or with me. In your conversations and explanations, avoid all details and amplifications which are not absolutely necessary."

F. de Ravignan well knew the art of himself concurring in inflicting that mortification, the practice of which he recommended. One day he called at the house of the Sacred Heart at Amiens, before beginning his retreat at Saint-Acheul, and told them this good news with the air of a man who is starting for his holiday: "To-morrow," he said, with a smile, "I am going up in my balloon; and for eight days at least I shall not belong to this world." The Superioress asked him to visit them when his balloon came down, and bring the community some news from above. He gave a promise, and came accordingly. But when he saw the great eagerness of all to hear his discourse, it appeared to him that this holy curiosity might be made the natural object of a sacrifice more holy still. Accordingly he shut himself up in perfect silence, and to all the applications made to him he returned but one answer, which admitted of no reply: "I should have preached mortification to you; well, I make you practise it; so my silence speaks more forcibly than my tongue could have spoken it."

Such was the masculine religious education which F. de Ravignan gave the nuns of the Sacred Heart, and which probably the world would have been far from suspecting; with a penetration which

seemed inspired, he derived its principles from the very name they bore. One Friday in Lent, at the conclusion of a contemplation upon the dying words of our Saviour, *It is consummated*, he suddenly exclaimed:

“Yes, all is consummated, but all is not yet at an end! My dear sisters, recollect yourselves profoundly. Contemplate what is passing before you with pious and loving attention! The circumstance of the Passion belongs especially to you; it is for you—yes, for you in particular, that our Lord allows the spear to inflict on Him so broad and deep a wound. Do you see Him? He is pierced to the Heart! The foundations are laid of that Society which was destined to propagate His glory. And where were they laid? On the cross! In death. Yes, in death itself! Oh, my dear sisters, what then ought to be your spirit; for this Society is your own? A spirit of death! Yes, a spirit of death; that is, a spirit of detachment and sacrifice. And why? because the foundations of your Society were laid in death, our Divine Saviour not having allowed His Heart to be pierced until after His death. Death, then, to everything! Yes, death to your affections, death to your natural inclinations, death to your passions, death to your desires, death to your own will, death to your own mind, death to your own judgment, death to your own way of acting, death to your tastes, death to your thoughts, death to your senses, death to your imagination, death, in a word, continual and habitual! Yes, we must come to be able to say with truth, ‘I die at every breath; as my body loses some of its life at every beat of my heart, so nature receives in me a mortal blow in every action of the day.’”

The zeal felt by F. de Ravignan for the spiritual advancement of these religious born under the

Cross, and sprung from the Sacred Heart of Jesus, was far from absorbing all his energies, and leading him to forget the other roads by which God leads souls to perfection. There were few communities of women in Paris who did not have recourse to him; and he was enabled by a special gift from heaven to understand the particular spirit of each institute. In a pious tribute paid to his memory by the Superioress of the first convent of the Visitation, I read: "He had a rare degree of understanding the spirit of our holy Founder; and in the direction he gave us, he apprehended the tendency of grace in a way that often astonished us. Many of our members bless God, Who employed him to act upon their wills as the instrument of His own will. He was able to understand the pains suffered by a soul under the trial of temptation, and to bring himself within reach of the weakest to impart vigour to them. His gentleness and moderation were admirable, when he happened to be told that other directors had been consulted, and had come to a different conclusion from him: "Well, you must follow his advice," was the only answer he made on one of the occasions, which must have been very mortifying to him. When he had made up his mind as to God's will in the case of any person, he upheld the soul with no less firmness than patience, accepting all the painful consequences which flowed from his decision, and never complaining of the contradictions he had to undergo.

The world sees nothing but the slavery of obedience behind these grilles, within these cloisters, which appear so chill and gloomy to those without; the world imagines nothing but the weariness of solitude, and the uselessness of a life passed in the idleness of contemplation. F. de Ravignan pointed them out as the seat of liberty of the children of

God, of the holy happiness of the spirit, of the peace of the Cross, of the apostolate of prayer and of sacrifice offered to the divine justice for the salvation of souls.

To the daughters of St Teresa, buried as in a sepulchre, he said : "A Carmelite ought, if we may so speak, to be transformed into prayer, to be a prayer ; she ought to be rising unceasingly, like the smoke of the incense which ascends before God ; like the Angels of the mystic ladder, who were going up and going down uninterruptedly.

"A purified soul rises like a ray of light up to the throne of the uncreated Light ; not that clouds do not still remain by which that Light is hidden from the soul ; as long as we are on the earth we shall not see It, face to face. But these clouds which veil Its brightness from us do not hinder our union with It, nor prevent our feeling Its light and warmth."

From their close union with God he derived, as a conclusion, their power with Him, and added : "The Lord has chosen you from among the world, and separated you from the world ; devote yourselves for its salvation. The world is selfish ; it seeks itself only ; make yourselves its Apostles ; search after souls, as the pearl is sought for in the ocean ; though buried beneath the mass of waters, plunge into the depths of the divine justice to snatch it forth. When a thought of zeal comes to you, uniting you closely to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, receive it, nurture it, and respond to it, for the end that God is glorified ; for the end that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ may be perpetuated in all its fulness ; for the end that your own merits may grow for all eternity."

The eloquent religious was fond of confounding the prejudices of the world in the sermons he preached at the ceremony of putting on the reli-

gious habit. One day he took for his text the words of St Paul, "*Be zealous for the better gifts, and I show unto you yet a more excellent way,*" and he made the following division of these better gifts: his distribution is worthy of Bourdaloue, so prolific and complete is it:—

"What are those *better gifts* which a daughter of St Teresa comes to find on Carmel? I can express them in four words. First there is a better life—the life of Jesus Christ; then there are better goods—the goods of heaven. Again, there are better affections; religious life teaches us to love better. Lastly, we are set free, enjoy a greater liberty; we obey God only."

After having developed the first and second portions of his discourse, F. de Ravignan pointed out, that in religious life the affections are better, for they are purer and more generous; and then addressing the persons of the world who were present at the ceremony, he exclaimed, "Ah, you know it better than I, at the root of all the affections of the world there is an admixture of trouble; and you never find fulness of rest for your soul in natural affections. God forbid that I should condemn anything of that which God Himself has planted in your hearts! yet, I venture to say it, in the world you know not what it is to love, even in your most holy affections, in the affections belonging to your hearts and homes. I will take as an example that which is the purest, the most lawful of all your affections—I mean the feelings of a mother—and I venture to say that you know not what it is to love.

"You neglect nothing to give your children a brilliant education; to secure them a brilliant future in the world's eyes. But whether their eternal salvation is endangered; whether sin make its abode in their soul, do you question yourselves

about that? Do you think of that? What weakness is there often! No, you know not what love is. Do you feel sickness of soul for your son as much as sickness of body? And yet the only true motherly love is earnestness with God for the salvation of the children. Call to mind that Christian queen and mother who said to her son, *Rather would I see thee dead, my son, than guilty of a mortal sin.* What gives value to the affections is, that they are referred to God!

“Thus—I need not hesitate to say it—Love is best practised in religious life. A religious makes a sacrifice of self to the Lord on behalf of those who have been left in the arena; no desire is any longer felt but that of being offered up for their sanctification. This is to imitate God’s love for His creatures. It was with a view to our salvation that He created the world, that He created heaven, that He sent His Son on the Cross. It was not for the goods of the world that Jesus Christ suffered and died; it was for the soul—for the eternal salvation of souls. In like manner, God does not call a novice to Carmel, He does not make her a victim on the cross, except for His own glory, and for the salvation of the world.

“Call to mind the multitude of souls who bear about in the world the chains of sin, despising the most holy duties. See before you other souls who, on their behalf, place themselves, like Jesus Christ, between heaven and earth, victims devoted to appeasing God’s anger. Will you not admit that the affections of these are better? Yes; it is here that love is like God’s love—by the Cross, and by Sacrifice.”



ST. ALBERT'S COLLEGE LIBRARY

CHAPTER XXVI.

HIS INTERIOR LIFE.

Spiritual principles—Dominant thoughts—His tendencies, the roads he walked, his trials.

BEFORE we speak of the last sickness and death of F. de Ravignan, we will bring together into one view the principal characteristic features of his character, under its double aspect, spiritual and moral. This sketch will not merely gather up what has been already said concerning his interior life, but it will also complete what has gone before ; there are details which we were unable to connect with the course of events, and secrets which are learned only by analysis of the heart.

F. de Ravignan often spoke in his discourses of the influence of a dominant thought. "How strong is a man," he would exclaim, "whose whole energy is concentrated on one point! To think of one thing only, to wish for but one, to do but one—this is the secret of all power." In accordance with this teaching he was himself possessed by one idea, which ruled his whole existence.

A single passage of the Gospel in the mouth of St Ignatius had secured the vocation of St Francis Xavier ; the same Saint formed F. de Ravignan by

the first page of his Exercises. This primary truth, the foundation of his spiritual doctrine, was the only foundation on which the whole edifice of the perfection of this fervent religious was raised.

On the one side, God the Creator and Lord, the only Beginning and the only End; on the other, man, created to serve God on earth, and, at this price, to possess Him in heaven; in everything else, in the circumstances around us as well as the things we use; in health, riches, honours, life itself, no less than in sickness, poverty, contempt, and death; we must see nothing but means which have no real value except from their reference to our ultimate end, and which, hence, deserve in themselves nothing but indifference: such is the famous sentence which became F. de Ravignan's fixed idea, and on which his whole life was ordered.

Two prominent features of his spirituality sprang immediately from this wide and deep principle; the spirit of faith and the feeling of duty, the practical consequences of which were the renouncement of natural tastes and distastes, independence of the changes and chances of this world, a soul raised above all ordinary vulgar passions, which assured him amongst other men the high place due to a man of God. From the same source he also derived the perfecting of nature. Correctness of judgment and force of will were the most conspicuous points in his character; these solid and powerful faculties were developed under the impulse given by that grand principle which was the main-spring of all his actions. He united vigour and prudence, judged of all things by an infallible standard, and directed all things to an eternal end. Hence it was that he was seen passing across this world, making rapid strides along the straightest road, with heart always raised to God, and eyes ever fixed on heaven.

F. de Ravignan was a priest and religious, and he found himself drawn on from the worship of God to the service of the Church and the love of the Society by the connection of the objects, or rather by the oneness of the motive. "The Church of God and my Mother the Society, hold a large place in my mind and heart." This expression, so full of simplicity and truth, written with his own hand, and signed with his name, has seemed to us to suit better than any other words to place beneath his portrait.

F. de Ravignan had a boundless faith in the real presence of our Lord, in the virtue of His Sacrament and Sacrifice, and his soul truly *lived by the altar*. His greatest happiness on earth was to live in some deserted house near a Tabernacle; the absence of men doubled the joy he felt in the company of his Lord. On coming forth from this silence and from his long colloquies with Jesus Christ, he could only exclaim, "Yes, God sent me great graces: perfect solitude, the Blessed Sacrament all to myself! I had peace and consolation, and even my body was refreshed." In like manner St Francis Xavier would go and rest for the night under the eye of his good Master, leave at His feet the fatigue of the previous day, and gain new strength for the labours of the morrow.

But if the presence of Jesus Christ gives consolation, our support is found in divine union with Him: and according to the grand expression used by the Church in giving the Sacrament, the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ keeps the soul of the Christian. "The Mass," he would say, "is our treasure, an inexhaustible treasure!" He felt himself grow faint if deprived of this daily provision, he could no longer live. When any passing sickness prevented his celebrating, he would make a point of at least communicating; but if the indis-

position continued long, soon Communion no longer sufficed, but he felt the need of the Sacrifice. I can understand his feelings: the science of the Cross is learned at the altar.

This personal love for our Saviour was drawn with peculiar affection towards His Heart opened by the spear on Calvary. We shall soon see F. de Ravignan breathe his last on the very day when the Church recalls the memory of this Sacred Wound. The Sacred Heart of Jesus, overwhelmed with insults, drained of the precious Blood, was most dear to the Apostle—like that Heart, longing for humiliation and suffering. There was, if the expression be not too bold, and allowance be made for the infirmity of man, a rivalry in love and devotedness between the Heart of the Master and the heart of the disciple. This was no doubt the source of the special attraction felt by F. de Ravignan for all that bore relation to this devotion; and this tendency dates from the earliest days of his religious life. In a note written in 1825, I find these words: “Jesus, my God, my King, and my beloved Master, to render all the homage in my power to Thy Sacred Heart consumed with love for me, I consecrate and vow all that I have, and all that I am to Thy Divine Heart: my body and my soul, my memory, my understanding, my will, and my liberty, my heart with all its affections, all my pains and sufferings, all my consolations and good works, all my merits present and to come, for time and for eternity.”

This consecration is followed by another to our Immaculate Lady. *Everything for Mary*, was the motto which F. de Ravignan, in a childlike spirit, sometimes wrote at the head of his letters; as an orator he was the Apostle of Mary, Refuge of Sinners; and how often did he give glory to her name, celebrate her virtues and her prerogatives, tell of

her sorrows and her mercies? Although he had little taste for vocal prayer or facility in it, he said the rosary every day after finishing his breviary; he carefully preserved through six and thirty years of service the rosary made of small beads, set at wide intervals, which he had had when a novice at Mont-rouge, and this same rosary was twined round the Crucifix which his hands were grasping when chilled in death.

When meditating on the mysteries of our Blessed Lady in association with the sufferings and the triumph of her Son, at the manger, on Calvary, and in heaven, he thought far less of her joys than of her sorrows; for he himself was more familiar with sadness than with joy, and his heart felt the need of giving and receiving compassion. His confidential letters commonly concluded with one or other of the expressions, "*Farewell on the Cross!—Farewell in the Heart of the Mother of Sorrows.*" Whenever the Roman liturgy left him at liberty, he often said the Requiem Mass for the relief of the souls in Purgatory, often too the votive Mass of the Seven Dolours for his own consolation. "What a mystery!" he would exclaim, "what a work of God's will! The Mother of God devoted her whole lifelong to bitterness, sorrow, the Cross. And what a Cross! what sorrows! that privileged soul, that most holy, most exalted of creatures after the Sacred Humanity of her Son. This heart, the blessed sanctuary of all virtues, of all perfections, of all graces, the chosen object of God's love beyond all that we can imagine, this Heart is overwhelmed with sorrow and bitterness! May God bear with my weakness. Oh God! take, dispose, consume, so long as I love Thee, and cause Thee to be loved!"

Finally, F. de Ravignan clung to St Ignatius by

all the ties of religion and of family. As soon as he knew him he admired him, for he recognised in him reason raised by faith to the highest efficiency, and nature carried by grace to the utmost perfection ; he saw the virtue of a saint, the prudence of a wise man, the zeal of an Apostle, the constancy of a martyr, the learning of a master in moral and ascetic science, the genius of a legislator. From the very beginning the blessed Saint responded to the affection of his son, but their hearts went on to closer and closer union. I cannot mention precisely at what time this closer union began ; but from repeated confidential communications, I know that for the latter years of his life he enjoyed not mere distant affection, but direct immediate intercourse ; and from this period F. de Ravignan dealt with the Saint with all the familiarity of a child. On the one side there was unceasing invocation ; for long hours together spent in prayer, he spoke with his heart rather than his lips, repeating, *Father ! Father !* On the other side there was sensible assistance, and a presence almost real. "I do not see him," said F. de Ravignan : "I do more, I feel him ; he is there, and I touch him by my heart." St Ignatius, as we shall see, was not absent from his death-bed.

As to particular practices of devotion, F. de Ravignan had the utmost respect for all those that are in use in the Church, and recommended them from time to time ; but his own use of them was very moderate. Every one is not suited by every good thing, and each soul must walk in the way in which God leads it.

As to spiritual reading, assuredly not taste but time to him was wanting. During the weeks of summer, which he passed in retreat away from Paris, he took his full. He wrote from Saint-

Acheul: "I am reading St Basil, and St Gregory of Nazianzum: what men they were!" But when once he had come back to the Rue de Sèvres, there was no more leisure, nor steady reading. The books in his room consisted of the Bible, the Imitation of Christ, and the Book of the Exercises. He continued faithful to the maxim which regulated his earliest studies—*Non multa sed multum*; and he read few books but studied them much. Every morning he set aside as much time as he could for the Holy Scriptures, and a quarter of an hour in the evening for the Imitation. As to the Institute and the Exercises of St Ignatius, there was no time appointed beforehand, nor was such appointment necessary; as often as he was left unhindered, his heart went back to them as to its natural food. He was generally found engaged on this favourite study on his half-holidays, and he candidly acknowledged that he never opened these books without discovering something new.

F. de Ravignan had attained to that craving for prayer, that continued and spontaneous rising of the soul to God, which St Ignatius loved to see in his sons; that habit of apostolic men to leave God when necessary by external work at the call of duty, and to return to God by prayer as often as liberty was restored. Beyond the times prescribed by his rule for pious exercises, he gave himself to prayer at every free moment.

Let it be known, however, for it can only prove his perseverance to have been more meritorious, that his prayer was commonly as dry as the desert, as bitter as an agony. He applied to prayer, therefore, not as a pleasure, but as a duty: "I do not pray through a taste for it," he himself remarked, "but out of necessity and through desire." He was sure to find in prayer what he sought: God through faith, God with His grace, God for the

love of God Himself. This is enough for time ; the soldier of the Cross needs no sweetness that he may love, but he needs strength that he may toil and suffer.

The most distinct of all F. de Ravignan's natural inclinations, and the most extraordinary, considering his vocation and ministry, was his tendency towards solitude. It will be remembered that he said to his old father, "I naturally like being alone." Later, when living as a young man of the world in the middle of Paris, he wrote to his family: "You are fortunate in living in the country; for my own part I dwell much in the moral upper regions; and the air is much better than in the houses and streets of Paris. I never see any one, and yet I see a good many people; if you ask me how this is, I do not know. I try to make religion my life, my mind, my pain and pleasure, my success and my failure. Understand this if you can; this paradox is not without foundation, it includes some truth. Peace has now become to me like the longing of a sick man. The smallest noise makes me ill; I do not like to hear the sound of life around me. No doubt you will say it is wrong, a fault, a bad habit; but I say it is a real disease of the nerves or of some other organ." This letter bears date in 1819; what a strange style and strange philosophy for twenty-four! silence or death!

The young man was in the right when he confessed that this wish of his was carried too far; with the ardour of his age he rushed aside towards the desert just as others rush to the world; but yet its very excess proves the strength of the inclination of which we are speaking. In this point he was a Carthusian, in all others a Jesuit; it was the only point in his beloved vocation which gave him any trouble; he mortified his inclination, but

could not destroy it, and his whole life through he was forced to struggle against this natural tendency.

However, I do not doubt that in this natural inclination, there was something of the action of grace. When F. de Ravignan sacrificed it to obedience, in order to give himself up to the labours of his ministry, he had opportunity for self-conquest; when he followed it so far as his vocation allowed, he was enabled to remain a man of contemplation in the midst of active life; and these continual aspirations after the desert were a safeguard against the inroads of the world, in the midst of which he was thrown by his apostolate. And no signs were remarked in him, which disclosed nature betraying herself by her weaknesses.

There was, however, nothing of melancholy in this; it may be true that out of his room his heart was full of weariness and sadness; but in retreat he found nothing but joy in the midst of peace. On going into retreat he wrote: "How pleasant solitude is! I hunger and thirst after it; I am like a shipwrecked man on a plank." He took pleasure in community life; his soul was at ease in a house of the Society; and in the company of his Brethren he seemed one of the most cheerful.

Still less was he urged to solitude by the fear of trouble or the fatigue of labour. I know he sometimes blamed himself for this, but there was nothing for which he did not blame himself, and he was sure to speak ill of his rest no less than of his labour. As long as the protracted season of his active apostolic work lasted, it might have been thought that he had a horror of remaining quiet; he seemed so thoroughly devoted to active business, and he was so cheerful that his heart might have been thought to have been wholly in it. When after ten months of labour in the ministry

his task was over, and the dull season began, he would exclaim, "How much I feel the need of rest and solitude!" And just as he never began this pious holiday before the proper time, in like manner he did not prolong it unduly. He was as punctual in returning to Paris as he had been in leaving. After a two months' absence he wrote to one of his Brethren, "Now I must return to active life, so far, that is, as obedience shall appoint. The very most that can be said is, that I am not altogether useless."

There was one peculiarity in this love of solitude which could scarcely have been suspected. What will not humility invent! We have already said that F. de Ravignan's humility went to extremes. His motive in going into retirement was to rid others of annoyance, no less than to procure freedom for himself. This thought recurs continually in a multitude of letters, in which he opens his heart with freedom; it was clearly a ruling sentiment in his mind:—"Perhaps this marked taste for retreat is only one more in the list of my defects. What profit have I made of retirement? I will put off as long as possible laying on you again the miserable burden of my presence." And again, writing to his Superior: "I have really felt pain, and almost remorse, for having left you in the midst of so many sources of anxiety, to come here on the look-out for selfish repose. Be so very kind, my dear father, as to pardon me. If I had been good for anything while I was with you, I would have followed the inclination of my heart, and remained. *Elongavi fugiens*. I am conscious that, by withdrawing, I relieved you of a part of your burden. What do you or the Society get from me besides trouble? And the Society, like a good mother, gives me this perfect rest; me, ungrateful child and unprofitable servant that I am. What

have I done to deserve to be treated with such tenderness? Yet I relish and enjoy this tenderness."

F. de Ravignan preferred to pass his holiday in the silence of a Noviciate, rather than in the bustle of a College. We can easily understand this preference: it took him in turn to Saint-Acheul, near Amiens, and to Issenheim, in the department of the Upper Rhine, lying between Colmar and Melhausen, at the foot of the Vosges, and looking towards the Black Forest. "I find Saint-Acheul," he said, "full of pious recollections. It will soon be thirty years since I first went there to teach, just after my theology and priesthood. What advance have I made since that time? This question gives rise to much pondering. What a failure my life has been! But I keep up hope, and throw myself into the Heart of our Lord." At Issenheim his memories of the Valais were recalled, as he looked on that primitive mountain scenery, which seemed still to retain the impress of the Almighty Hand of its Creator. "In this House," he wrote, "everything is religious, the buildings and their inmates. Facing my window there are the Vosges, and the landscape is charming; plains, forests, mountains, streams, there is nothing wanting. Inside there are spacious galleries, a single range of excellent rooms. The chapel is beautiful, and has a most graceful effect. I could wish you nothing better than to have a facsimile of it in Paris on a rather larger scale.

"This house seems to me very regular: modesty, silence, poverty, reign throughout it. These dear novices give me much edification, and do me real good.

"I enjoy perfect tranquillity here; there are no visits to be paid or received, nothing to take me abroad. People might have thought to do me

a pleasure by paying me attention; but I have been left just as suits my taste, alone in our religious house, and its extensive and beautiful grounds. I have seven or eight hours of calm uninterrupted work, then my exercises, and an occasional walk in the garden. The fresh air, perfect liberty, calm and freedom from interruption, the restoration of my strength—all this weds me to my work. But what result will it have? You know very well that I never am content with what I do."

This holiday and solitude did not deliver him completely. "My life here is perfectly calm," he wrote, "but it is always dull to live by one's-self. If only I felt any interior assurance that I should not increase the weight of your heavy burden! but I find nothing of the sort. This leisure is selfish. I am afraid of it. I have not bought it at the price of fatigue and exhaustion. Besides, I find the Cross here again, for I bear it about with me, the Cross in the soul, and a little in the body too. I daresay neither will find ease from advancing years. But to suffer in calm and alone, is a fate to which I must be resigned."

Love of solitude and desire for death resemble each other, and go together. Both lasted throughout the life of F. de Ravignan, and were satisfied only on the eve of his deliverance in eternity. At Saint-Acheul, no less than at Issenheim, he said, "May the day soon come, if it is to come, when all the bonds of natural life shall be broken! Come, a little while longer; but life is so heavy a load! This is not our country: our country—when shall we reach it? If you arrive there before the poor traveller you know of, summon him soon to join you. But no, he will leave you on this earth; the number of his days will, I hope, be completed before yours. It is all well, provided we live and

die in God. Let us suffer, and ever go forward ; let us die, and rejoice !”

Thus everything combined to make F. de Ravignan long for his spiritual retreats: his child-like feeling towards St Ignatius, his esteem and love for the Exercises, his inclination to prayer, and craving for silence. The one retreat a year prescribed by the rule is enough for others; he was not content with less than two. Obedience allowed him to adopt this pious singularity.

When once, with his Superior's concurrence, he had fixed the day and time, nothing on earth stood in the way of his resolution; by some means or other everything was forced to give way to the retreat. Both before and after the week set aside for God, he redoubled his efforts to anticipate coming business, or to make up arrears. Once in solitude, an inviolable rule sheltered him against the world, and kept him free from even written messages. He thought so much of being alone with God, that he wished neither to see nor to be seen.

He commonly remained in Paris for his winter retreats, but secured under double lock and key; for he closed the door not only of his room, but also of the antechamber. He was never seen in the refectory with the community; for he obtained leave to go to the Second Table, because the meals there do not last so long as at the First Table, and at this time silence had more value for him than public reading. His Brethren only saw him pass like a shadow along the gallery which led from his room to the chapel.

But when he made his summer retreats out of Paris, he allowed himself more latitude. On one occasion, at Nôtre-Dame-de-Liesse, he spent eight days, from morning to night, in a small tribune

facing the Tabernacle. When he was at Saint-Acheul, he left the house along with a good Lay Brother, and went half a league to the small farm at Cagny, the novices' humble villa. "I stop in this solitude," he said, "alone with the Blessed Sacrament, that I may neither see any one, nor hear a voice for eight days together."

The smallest circumstances sometimes reveal a character, and a man betrays himself so much the more in proportion as he thinks himself free from observation. F. de Ravignan's observance of the Rule had become so habitual, that he wished everything to go on at Cagny just as in a community. The bell gave the signal for all the exercises of the day, from four in the morning to nine at night. The Brother wished to serve in the Refectory, but the Father insisted on his sitting beside him, and they took their meal together without a word ever being spoken.

F. de Ravignan managed still better in Alsace. He wrote from Issenheim: "I go into retreat at Thierbach to-morrow evening. What a happiness! all alone on the mountain amongst the pines, with the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin. There, close to her old sanctuary, which is still much revered in this pious neighbourhood, there is a dilapidated old house, which is rented for the novices' recreation days and vacations. The good Master of Novices gives me leave to stay there for eight days with a Brother for companion. You know how much I love solitude."

During these retreats at Thierbach, F. de Ravignan sometimes left the house in the morning with a morsel of bread in his pocket, and the Book of the Exercises on his arm, telling the Brother not to expect him till evening. He was engaged throughout the day in meditation and prayer on the mountain, amidst the grand silence of nature,

sometimes sitting on a lofty eminence, sometimes walking in the pine-forest. About noon he went down into the valley, and moistened his bread in the water of some stream. After taking this refreshment, which St Antony might have shared, he retraced his steps to the higher ground.

He had one book only with him during these retreats, and that was the Book of the Exercises. He could not even understand how a Jesuit could need anything more, except perhaps the New Testament and the Imitation of Christ. "It is our Book," he said, "our inheritance, our treasure; there is everything for us in it. To believe that one knows it over-well, is to show a want of understanding of it. This Book does not wear out; it is like the Gospel, always new. The more we look for in it, the more we find; and the more thoroughly it is possessed, the more sensible are we how much there is which it still remains to master." He made the Institute also the subject of meditation during his retreats; but without going out of the Book of the Exercises in which the Institute of St Ignatius is contained in its spirit, means, and end.

He had such a habit of prayer, that he left the usual routine of retreats, and did not fix the number or the length of his meditations. His custom was to make one only, but one which lasted all the hours of the day. He began it in the morning, and continued it, without drawing breath, to the evening; feeling no fatigue in his head, and finding real repose of heart.

In the course of the Exercises, he was faithful to the rule laid down by St Ignatius, and persevered on one point, until he had obtained the result proper to that point, and gained thorough conviction, deep feeling, and perfect resolution. He allowed his soul to remain under the impres-

sion of the truth until it was prostrate in repentance, or established in indifference, or resigned to sacrifice, or warmed with generous love.

To give some idea of the feelings which F. de Ravignan brought away from his retreats, I cannot do better than quote some of his confidential notes :—

“I have just come from my solitude : my soul feels a deep calm in abandonment to the guidance of grace, going on blindly with a deep feeling of its misery, but with sweet, perfect, entire confidence.”

Another time he said : “On coming out of my dear, deep solitude I feel constrained to write to you. Oh, my dear father, God is good, a thousand times good to His unworthy servant. These days of silence and prayer passed away in peace and consolation, but not without deep repentance for my sins, the grievous faults of my long life. But, while throwing myself on to the bosom of the boundless mercy of God, I must not forget that all the days were calm, and were under a gentle influence of grace. Oh, that I had been able to give up, to deliver my whole soul to Him ! Oh, that I were able to repair the past, to be devoted and obedient, and to bend my rebellious nature and make it serve !”

At the end of another retreat he wrote to his Superior : “Looking at the matter calmly in the presence of our Lord, I think it a duty to write you a few lines. Be so good as to receive them in a kind spirit : they will lay my heart more perfectly open before you than could be done by word of mouth.

“The deep-seated longing of my soul is to kneel and ask the pardon of my best of Fathers for my inconceivable failings in my duty towards Him. You will credit what I say : these great faults arise

from the defects of my character, not of my heart which feels, and shall ever feel, towards you the most lively gratitude, the most religious reverence, and the most unaffected sorrow.

"I feel also, while I am under the influence of grace, that I have a twofold request to make of you. Kindly grant my application; it could not possibly be more sincere, more hearty, or more earnest. If Divine Providence does not change my destination, and put some other in my place under your fatherly authority, I *urgently beg* of you to admonish me as often as I shall hereafter let myself be carried away by my characteristic violence, my pride and impatience on meeting any contradiction. During these days of recollection I have felt more than ever how far removed I am from those virtues of charity and humility with which my brethren are filled: I have grieved more for this than I am able to express. Besides prayer, the remedy is found in being *admonished* by my Superior, without any scruple. I venture to say, that the moment the effervescence is over, your opinion will be my light, my strength, and consolation.

"Again there is in me an essential defect in the spirit of obedience. I am without any part of what is essential to it; I beseech you, if I come again under your direction, to fix precisely the position I am to hold, my ministry and my employment. Do not prudence and discernment belong solely to Superiors?

"Again I beg you to excuse me, and grant me what I ask. Consider this communication, from the most unworthy and miserable of your children, as a real testimony of hearty repentance, devotedness, gratitude, and respect."

We need scarcely say that the Superior found nothing that needed excuse in this severe struggle against natural vehemence; the humble and fervent

religious perceived nothing but defeats, while others saw nothing but victories.

Notwithstanding this marked taste for retreat and silence, F. de Ravignan felt the need of opening his heart. He was at once reserved and liberal in granting his confidence ; to the bulk of men he said nothing about himself, to a very small number he made an entire disclosure. It may be said that he received the former at the outer door of his soul and declined to take them further: he took the latter into the house, and made them acquainted with every feeling and thought. Self-love had no existence in his character, and, therefore, could not check the freedom of these communications ; on the contrary, he always began with what gave him trouble, and especially with whatever was most humiliating ; I believe that this longing for intimacy arose in part from his humility. Since he could not tell everybody all that he thought of himself, he was at least able to ease himself of part of his load ; and, to use his own language, he found some relief and consolation in the avowal of his wretchedness. "This confidential intercourse," he said, "is very sweet to me amongst the miseries of my life."

F. de Ravignan's destiny was an unceasing martyrdom of heart, and mortification was mixed even with what gave him comfort. Grace sometimes led him to look on this relief as blameworthy ; and from time to time withdrew from him, and then restored to him the power of enjoying it. He was constant in making everything a source of humility, and he accepted the privation as a chastisement of his faults ; and when he regained freedom in opening his heart, he looked on it as a support granted to his weakness.

He wrote to one of his brethren who had most of his confidence as to his thoughts and troubles :

"We are separated; we were almost separated even while we saw each other; for, on account of my unworthiness, it had come to pass that the religious intimacy which had formerly prevailed between us had given place to such simple relations as are common to all. But a fond recollection remains, and I shall never forget your patience and kindness."

Once only he let it be known that he felt the suspension of the former intimacy, but he was not slow to disavow his expression of regret: "I withdraw, in the most absolute manner possible, the sort of expression of regret which I allowed to escape me the other day. I have well-deserved the privation of comfort of every sort; my countless sins make it right that they should be withdrawn from me; my pride and hateful resistance have made me unworthy of this intimacy. There ought not to be, nor can there be, any change in the relations now existing between us."

On the other hand, in another letter, he makes known his yearning and desire for a renewal of the old terms of intimacy: "I have recovered the power of being free with you. My dear Father, I find support in the thought of you and in your name. Bear with the most unworthy, but at the same time most devoted, of your brethren and children."

He wrote again to the same effect on coming out of a retreat: "After my poor soul had gone through a long and well-deserved period of bitterness and restraint, after being under the almost uninterrupted sway of a sort of desolation, God has been pleased to exert the consoling influence of His Spirit, and to keep your memory always before my soul: and I cannot avoid seeing herein a marked design of our Lord, with everything to show His light and His goodness. Yes, in the midst of peace and full of regret I have found you again as the Father and

friend of my soul—I, most unworthy of your children. Is this then a desire, a hope coming from God? I cannot doubt it. My dear Father, it is my *duty* to beg you to take upon yourself again the burden of my whole confidence. God restores me that liberty, that blessing which He had taken from me, the loss of which I had but too well deserved. Say, Yes, *fiat*. Dear Father, I ever feel for you the most tender respect."

F. de Ravignan's inclinations and repugnances must have already indicated the ways by which God led his soul. They may seem formidable. I hardly know whether the world, which knows nothing of such paths, will be able to comprehend them; but I venture to think that it will be wise enough to show them respect. Before the souls of Christians can be scandalised at them, the desert must have been forgotten where Jesus was pleased to be tempted by the Demon; the Garden of Gethsemane, where He was assaulted by the attacks of inexpressible sadness; and Calvary, where He seemed to be abandoned by God. A Christian, said St Augustine, must needs suffer more than a man, a Saint more than an ordinary Christian, for trials are sent in proportion to the strength, the profession, and the destiny of each. Let, then, no one be terrified: Providence is wise and good, and is not wont to treat the feeble like the strong; and when our Lord requires a soul to drink His bitter chalice, He causes that soul to find sweetness and peace.

It is true that the tribulations of this life last but an instant, as the Apostle tells us for our comfort; but it must be confessed that when they are endured for a whole lifetime they seem indeed long. F. de Ravignan suffered severely, and his whole life through. Solitude brought some relief

to his pain, but did not remove it altogether ; and if his soul gained strength from prayer, his prayer passed amidst desolation. Sickness alone had power to divert his mind, by substituting one torment for another, bodily suffering for the suffering of the mind. It might well have been thought that labour would avail to distract, but it had no such effect ; even in all the animation of action, he remained under trial, and subject to all its misery ; exposed to suffering from two sources, from his interior grief and from the violence he was constrained to do himself. But how shall I describe the number, kind, and intensity of these mysterious tortures ? To see them, turned my heart sick, and I still feel moved at their remembrance. It is impossible, I know, to have the direction of souls without witnessing trials ; but I declare that among all that I have met *by the way, I have not found sorrow like unto his sorrow.* His life was nothing but an incessant struggle against nature, against Hell, and against Heaven itself.

F. de Ravignan might be proposed as an example for the instruction of such as look for excuse in the rebellion of their character and disposition. He was so strenuous in keeping his soul in patience, that he allowed nothing of his struggle with himself to betray itself outwardly ; nothing was seen but peace where nothing prevailed but war. Nothing short of strength and constancy of will, with the support of grace, sufficed to subdue his unconquerable nature. I do not believe that any one would have reproached him with being over-tender with himself ; I myself was inclined to blame him rather for being violent in opposition to violence, and for thus falling into the defect from which he was seeking to escape. A thousand times did he conquer and put himself in chains, a thousand times did he overthrow and crush pride and anger

in his soul, he glutted his heart with mortification and humiliation ; and though this unyielding nature was constantly beaten down, it always rose up again ; and even when it might well have been exhausted by so many blows, and enfeebled by age, whereby all else is worn out, it ever seemed still full of sap and in all the vigour of youth.

The victor was disheartened by these ceaseless struggles, of which he saw no sensible fruit, and said with a groan, "How wretched I am ! and for what am I destined ? I have not yet acquired the easiest point of a single virtue, and I still bear about in me the germs of every vice. Old as I am I have the faults of a child ; I have accomplished nothing, and just as I am finishing, I ought to be beginning afresh." In his own case, therefore, he forgot, what he so well understood in the case of others, that multiplied victories multiply merits, and that God often leaves faults to struggle against in the choicest souls, to oblige them to humility and self-conquest.

But F. de Ravignan had at the same time to struggle against an enemy still more to be dreaded than his own nature. When Hell made its assaults against him, grace, doubtless, came to establish equality between the combatants ; but this assistance gave him strength while he did not perceive it, although he was very sensible of the power of the temptation. As soon as one gained any knowledge of his interior, one recognised, on the one hand, this action from without, to which, not by any concurrence of his own, all the inferior parts of his soul were exposed ; and, on the other hand, was seen the will, strong and constant, always standing apart, and raised aloft in the spirit with God and liberty. The Lord had granted the enemy of human nature some period of freedom ; and if a conjecture may be formed from the violence of the

attack, I could readily have believed that it was worthy of his prowess to measure his strength against such a soldier, or at least to revenge himself on such an Apostle.

There was a third struggle, more severe than the other two. F. de Ravignan would have been happy in the midst of all his pains if God had seemed to be content with him. But the good Master Himself left his devoted servant in desolation. Not only was Heaven closed, and seemingly of brass, but It appeared armed and threatening. It is a real trial when nature furnishes no enjoyment, and grace no longer yields us joy, and we seem deserted by God Himself. Where, however, there is great love, this is not what causes greatest suffering; the fear of having offended God is what torments a soul that is generous and devoted to God. A person will attribute to himself, as the voluntary and responsible cause, impressions which arise from character, or are a result of temptation; or at least he will be in doubt whether they ought not to be attributed to some such source; and, in this painful uncertainty, it is natural that humility should incline to a severe judgment. Hence results confusion on account of a fault which it is believed has been committed, or terror at one which is foreseen as imminent. F. de Ravignan's habitual state was that here described, he was ready to put up with agony, but could he put up with sin?

The secret of all he had to undergo in the humiliation and agony of this threefold conflict, often sustained simultaneously, was confided to no one but his Superior. "No one," he said, "has any suspicion of what I suffer in soul and body. I believe that I am in appearance tolerably cheerful. In all other company than yours I consider myself as being, for this matter, with strangers; you alone are not felt to be a stranger to my poor soul." He

required that every trace of his confidential communications on this point should be removed from his correspondence. It is only by chance that I have found and have been able to put together some fragments of a solitary letter which had been torn up by his orders. I deem it my duty to rescue it from the oblivion to which it was condemned, for the benefit of any souls who may be subject to the same trials.

“Reverend Father, your unwearied kindness seemed to complain of the lapse of an interval of five or six days without your receiving news from me. I wrote you yesterday at some length, and now to-day I am writing to you again. The reason is that my letter was silent as to the torments I endure, and was of no service in giving me relief. I am trying to find a little calm and relief in disclosing to you all I suffer.

“The truth is that I am in greater agitation; worse than ever. No : gross material images, scum seething under the action of a tremendous fire, could not represent more motion, more violence, more ebullition, than my soul ; it is like the raging ocean, or the glowing fire of a blacksmith’s forge.

“Pardon me, dear Father, if I speak the language of temptation ; condescend to listen and to bear with it for a moment.

“What is the good of submission, of self-renouncement, of blind obedience ? Where can I look for support, light, and direction ? Nowhere. I have continually laid myself open in order to conquer myself, to seek for peace, to find a heart to understand me and sympathise in my sorrows. I have done all I can in opening my conscience ; I have gone to excess in seeking advice ; nothing gives me light or guidance.”

Thus tormented and tried by darkness, the religious was a victim to the strange strife of the two

wills that contended within him. He has let us hear the voice of the tempter ; let us listen to his own words :—

“ Reverend Father,” he went on, “ this is folly, it is the language of Satan. My reason has not the least share in it ; neither has my liberty nor heart ; there is no consent whatever on my part. It is not myself, but it is within me. When you think of the violence of my character you may judge what I suffer. Faith and vocation remain intact. Faith, that faith which alone I wish to consult in my position of subject ; this retains me in real voluntary respect for my superiors, as concerns at least that part of my soul which is spiritual and endowed with free-will. The reverence and love I feel towards you are as tender and as faithful as is possible. When I recall my incredible faults, my sorrow is acute, and I endure a martyrdom. I cannot see, I cannot reason ; I am unable to pray, and I raise myself to God a thousand times. I am disgusted, and I humble myself ; I submit, I have no wish, I ask for nothing.

“ Instead of all this, Reverend and too kind Father, imagine that my soul blasphemes God, that it curses and hates, while still loving and adoring Him, and I think you will have a correct point of view of my state.

“ My dear Father, what will you think ? what will you do ? what is your worthless, unfortunate Brother ? A most contemptible object, but most deserving of compassion ; for his sufferings are extraordinary.

“ Shall I send you this letter ? Is it not at once a treatise on mental derangement or diabolical possession, and an example of it ? When will my deliverance come ? When Thou shalt please, O my God !

“ I have found relief in relating these follies,

which I hate, even though my character gives them so much foundation. I feel better. Bless me, dear Father, and pray for me !”

On the following day, the poor Father resumed his pen : “ This letter, full of sorrow, was written yesterday evening. A little liberty and calm have been restored to me ; this is due to some hours’ rest during the night, to the meditation this morning, and Mass, and the feast of St Teresa ; to my deep and affectionate attachment to you, to my complete abandonment of myself into your hands while I throw myself on your fatherly and friendly heart, and to a feeble glimmer of grace. I was long hesitating whether to send you these strange pages ; I think I ought to do so, for the sake of the humiliation. . . . Do not fret yourself, do not be angry with me ; no, no, it is not I myself that rave and blaspheme in this manner ; I dare assert this in the face of God. I love and revere you, and wish you all blessings and graces ; I lament and detest my grievous reiterated faults, so incredible after all your boundless kindness. I am bound, united to the Society and my Superiors without exception, and I desire to be so in heart and in faith until my death.

“ I ought to tell you all this kneeling before you, to confess whatever is voluntary and culpable at all, ready to appear before God to be judged. My conscience may be deceived ; judge me, but pardon and do not abandon me ; my suffering is that of torment and tempest.

“ You now know all, my dearly beloved Father ; I shall be more calm ; I shall be better able than ever to answer to the enemy, My Father, my Friend knows all. *Fiat.*

“ Yes, unworthy and miserable as I am, I venture to seek rest in you. Bless and pardon me with the great mercy which fills your heart.

“Farewell on the Cross!”

For some time F. de Ravignan wrote a spiritual chronicle of himself every day; it is what he called his journal. His object was to relieve his heart of a burden, and to be better able to lay it open before his Superior. I feel now great regret for the loss of these many pages, sometimes full of sorrow as the Lamentations of Jeremiah, sometimes glowing as the transports of St Teresa; all has perished in the flames except this terrible apostrophe: “My God, I will bless and extol Thy mercy and Thy justice. Shame has covered my face like a dark veil of mourning; remorse has pierced my heart like a sharp arrow. I weep, I groan, I abhor my sins, I hate and despise myself, and I say to the Demon, ‘Yes, I am viler than you; laugh heartily at my folly, my insane, absurd vagaries. Look at the triumph you have attained: I deserve to be the object of your keenest irony.’” These words will not seem strange to those who know the language of the Saints. The excessive humility of St Francis Borgia led him to pass an hour of his daily prayer, stationed beneath the feet of Satan, compared with whom he called himself the more deserving of contempt.

In critical hours such as here described, care is needed no less than patience. Let us see what care was used by F. de Ravignan. He omitted none of the means prescribed for souls under trial. He showed himself more faithful than ever to the counsels given by St Ignatius in the Exercises, and made absolutely no change in the resolutions he had previously formed. He prayed more than ever, but did not work less. Whatever was the aspect the heavens assumed, whatever the state of his heart, he went on his way with an even pace and an unaltered mien, and the tempest never made him turn back, nor deviate one inch from his road.

Although he made no changes dictated by feebleness, he made some modifications as circumstances suggested, using a variety of means to dispel or moderate the violence of the storm, and especially to escape from danger. Man's part is to help himself, and God will save him.

He tried the plan of using bodily mortifications, carrying it even to extremities in his holy wrath, hoping to purchase peace at least at the price of his blood. He armed himself against the attempts of the enemy with that terrible shirt beset with needle-points, which we have already mentioned. He often remained several days together without taking any nourishment—not even a morsel of bread or a drop of water; and this severe fasting was secured from attracting notice by the pretext of nausea. But he was warned, and before long he himself felt the truth, that these violent remedies only irritated the evil, without giving relief. There is no room for being unbending with God; man cannot force His Hand; but he ought, as the Apostle teaches, to humble himself beneath the All-powerful Arm.

There are some souls who, in time of desolation or temptation, are actuated by self-love, and conceal their trouble from those who would be glad to know it; while out of weakness they show their bad humour to such as need not be informed. F. de Ravignan, on the contrary, revealed his whole interior to those who had the care of his soul with the simplicity of a child; but he had the constancy of a man in maintaining before others a calm, free, and placid exterior. It might have been thought that he had escaped and passed beyond all storms; though beaten more than others by the tempest, he acted as though he stood firm on his feet. His words were more abundant and full of sympathy than ever, and he surpassed him-

self in encouraging those about to fall, calming the agitated, giving consolation to others the more effectually because he was himself without consolation. Astonishment was expressed at this: "Why are you surprised," he answered; "it is a mere phenomenon; I am only a machine. I do not know what I am going to say; I am not conscious of what I am saying. There is Another Who speaks by my mouth, and to Whom all the effect is due."

Once only, when his troubles were at their height, a cast of gloom came over the language used by him in an exhortation addressed to his Brethren; he seemed to grow indignant, and spoke strongly against confidence, not of course against true and holy confidence, but against such as is illusory and presumptuous. There was some exaggeration in the way he expressed himself, and perhaps some fundamental want of accuracy in his doctrine. He was at the time Superior of the House in Paris, but he had himself a Superior in Rome who was informed of the matter, and who forthwith wrote: "I have heard it said that you once spoke in a manner to give the impression that you see nothing but God's justice inculcated in the Exercises of our Holy Father, and that, accordingly, you see in them much more of fear than of confidence. My dear Father, this view was clearly a result of desolation. No, no; there is fear too, and it comes first; it is the needle which finds its way through; but the thread must follow, and that thread is confidence. God asks us to have confidence much more than to have fear; and it is really confidence that makes the fear salutary." F. de Ravignan received this little lesson taught him by his Father with humility and joy; no one could surpass him in his love of being admonished. How often he said to his Superiors,

"Reprove me ; do it often, and without hesitation ; it does me a great deal of good, and fills me with consolation !"

The humble religious was full of veneration for F. Roothaan ; he had laid his whole soul bare before him, and often sought consolation from him, and especially advice. The answers he received to his letters always brought him back to patience and confidence : " You have spoken to me, my dear Father, on your troubles ; they are trials, and a great means of sanctification. I recommend you to read that beautiful second chapter of Ecclesiasticus—*Endure, endure*, and that which succeeds it on confidence in God. Cheer up, Father ; be hearty in chanting, *The mercies of the Lord will I sing for ever*. Do you not know by experience that the Lord has been merciful towards us. Confidence, then—confidence ! you have need of it for yourself, and for the sake of others ; it will be by confidence that you will glorify God.

"Excuse me for using this expression, which comes from my heart ; I love you too much not to feel it severely when I know that you are going through these interior trials. If it is our Lord's will that you should endure them, you must bow the head ; but cease not to say, *Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation*. The oil, *oleum lætitiæ*, must always rise to the top—always."

F. Roothaan sent him the following letter in 1849 : " At the time I am now writing to you the feast of St Francis Xavier has not come to an end. You know how I pray for you. Yes, *wait*, in the midst of your trials. *All who wait for Thee shall not be confounded*. Some day you will thank the Lord for all this ; do not admit a doubt of it. I would also recommend you to read Blosius, especially his *Canon Vitæ Spiritualis*. The perusal of this book has within my knowledge been

beneficial to some persons who were undergoing a similar martyrdom. Blood flows from the Heart of Jesus: the Heart of Mary, though no less pierced, yields none; the martyrdom allotted to us is like this, unbloody. *Fiat! Amen!*"

F. de Ravignan's own sentiments were not different; and as we have not hesitated to make known the strange impressions which came upon him without his consent, it is still more our duty to tell what were the dispositions of his own heart, the merit of which was the greater because they were not felt in any lively manner.

"Mere faith," he said, "faith without consolation, without light, in a spirit of expectation and denial of self-will, is a state sometimes found in the soul. Let us wait and hope! When the cross comes again with fresh severity, let us bow down to receive it, neglecting no active duty which is real and comes in our way; let us abandon ourselves.

"Peace and bitterness find their sweetness in prayer and suffering. We must aim at being able to dispense with all consolation, if such be the good pleasure of God. All passes away except the love of God, which does not leave us alone until it has consumed our life. But how difficult it is to be humbly, constantly, devotedly faithful.

"What are we then? What is there in us which resists union with God? Why are there these hateful revolts, these unmeasured, remediless discontents? What does it all mean? Oh, God, Thou has deserted me! But burn, consume, crush, annihilate everything in me; only, let me live to give Thee glory and to love Thee. How happy we should be if we could on these terms give more honour, more love to our Master! When I talk in this way I take courage and feel consoled.

"Whatever may be our feelings, whatever the state of our interior, we must believe, believe with

the firmest and most thorough faith, that God loves and protects us, and is leading us to the end with infinite affection and care.

“Let us keep repeating what we know already ; we need patience more than ever in the time of utter desolation and trial. St Paul tells us this, and he adds, that patience involves and brings along with it perfection. I believe this fully ; patience is difficult and of great merit.

“The further I advance in my humble yet beloved road, the conviction that we must endure suffering grows deeper, yet brings peace and consolation. This is a hard saying, but still it comes to us from the tenderest pitying love of our Lord. I often have recourse to the second chapter of Ecclesiasticus, and then to the *Our Father, Thy will be done.* . . . Grant us Thy love, Oh God ! After all, this path of sorrow has its appointed end ; we shall reach it. Let us go on with constant confidence and submission : submission is everything !”

A person had been hearing F. de Ravignan speak of this confidence in God, which was never to be altered on any supposition, and put the question, “What, Father, if God takes away this very confidence from you !” There was no delay in the answer ; it darted from his heart like an arrow : “If God took away my confidence itself, I should still have confidence.”

The following lines were written by the religious who underwent these trials, and sum up in a few words the suffering state of his soul, and the generous disposition of his heart : “I abandon myself in everything to the love and mighty will of God. Peace resides above, not below ; it is raised very high, up where Jesus is, where the spirit is lost and loses its own body and its senses, and all taste for this wretched earth. Oh ! that we

could reach this lofty summit of pure faith and spiritual contemplation, and thence exercise sway over self, over sin and suffering? But, Father, is it not true that this elevation brings suffering! that there is great suffering in it, that it cannot be reached nor retained except by a violent wrenching from self? But what freedom there is in it, what peace, what happiness! Perhaps I am talking foolishly; you will let me know."

These great sufferings have now come to an end: let us see whether they produced any happy results in his life, and what benefit the patient religious derived from them, even before receiving his reward. As gold is refined in the fire, as repeated friction polishes the diamond, it seemed clear that the Sovereign Master of hearts, after exhausting the strength of His servant in apostolic labour, resolved to finish the work and purify and adorn his soul by an interior martyrdom. Patience was to give perfection to his virtue, to multiply his merits, and his future glory a hundredfold in a short time. The Cross is not a barren tree; whatever it touches it makes fertile, and Heaven accepts no fruits but such as the Cross has hallowed.

Hitherto F. de Ravignan had never been much attached to life, but henceforth he could scarcely endure it: from indifference he went on to feel almost horror; and while others need to gather all their strength to resign themselves to death, all his powers were needed for an act of resignation to life. In the abyss of bitterness in which he was plunged, everything turned to bitterness. Still the true prevailing source of his protracted pain was not sorrow in suffering, but the fear of sinning at every turn. Once he wrote a letter at the bedside of one of his Brethren who was in his agony:

“There is one dying man here ; I only wish there were two, and I were the one nearer his end ! . . . Allow an old sinner to look forward to death. . . . I should be glad to die, that is the plain truth ; but I abandon myself to the current of the stream which bears me along.”

As F. de Ravignan was detached from life, much more was he detached from himself ; an abyss of humiliation was called to in his soul by an abyss of suffering. While sensible grace is absent and the influence of interior pains is felt, the just man is no longer aware of his virtue, and readily reaches self-contempt.

When humility is found, all virtues are purified and reach perfection in the crucible of temptation ; the supernatural work, the badge of the Christian, can be imprinted by the Cross alone.

Finally, these sufferings were the price at which F. de Ravignan bought three things which rendered his ministry so availing and so sweet : knowledge of the ways of God by personal experience ; indulgence, leading him to judge all others to be better than himself ; compassion felt for trials similar to his own.





CHAPTER XXVII.

GENERAL SKETCH OF F. DE RAVIGNAN.

Account of his Portrait : His Features, Bearing, Language, and Habits—His Character : modest, vigorous, and affectionate—Deaths of some of his Friends.



HE exterior of a man is the reflection of his soul ; and nothing can be more natural than to pass from F. de Ravignan's interior condition to its expression in his features, his movements and the glance of his eye, the tone of his voice, his habits of speech and action. This second sketch will not only show us the perfect harmony which prevailed between the interior and the exterior, but also, that which has preceded it will afford us the opportunity of completing our portrait by fresh details and by that delicate shading which gives finish to a picture. His death will follow, to give the last touches of the pencil, bringing a heavenly eternal ideal to give brightness to this passing earthly figure.

F. de Ravignan's exterior cannot pass into oblivion ; it remains living in an engraving, where the artist has risen to the height of the figure set before him. Some people have felt astonishment

that the humble religious consented to give sittings to an artist. We owe it to the truth to point out that the blame or merit is not due to him.

Up to the time in question, there were none but worthless representations of him, which distorted him so, that he could not be recognised, and was even made ridiculous. It was time to secure him; he would soon make his escape! His Superior one day spoke to him on the subject; he met with resistance: he was quite prepared for this, and insisted: "Remember, my dear Father, that when you were Superior, you levied the same tax on F. Varin, and that the good old man, with all the ease of a child, was content to answer, 'Well, I will do all that has to be done as well as I can.' I am now doing the like to you; or rather I am asking for much less. It is no longer a question of giving sittings to an artist, but only of passing a few minutes with a photographer." The religious obeyed. The success was perfect, and Madame Juliette de Bourge was kind enough to offer her skilful delicate pencil to give the portrait colour, and with it expression and life. By the aid of this photograph she completed a beautiful miniature on ivory. These were the only materials on which the portrait was to be founded; but one of the ablest and best-known engravers in Paris, M. Martinet, was filled with zeal for the work, and, after three months of labour, succeeded in achieving a masterpiece of such perfection, as to form one of the claims of the artist to a seat in the Institute.

F. de Ravignan's outward appearance, taken as a whole, presented a combination of nobility and thoroughly manly grace. It was pleasing both near and at a distance. If he was close at hand, the finely-cut features were appreciated; those

further removed were struck by the grandeur of the outlines. "When he was first seen in the pulpit," said M. l'Abbé Bautain, "with his handsome countenance so serious and recollected, and seeming furrowed with traces of mortification, all were at once filled with respect, and inspired with confidence, and perfectly predisposed to listen to God's minister; not to be tickled by his eloquence, but to be profited by it. And then, when he began to speak, the first accents of that grave voice, which harmonised so well with the majesty of the temple, at once caused a holy reverence to penetrate the soul, and produced in it a sort of thrill. I never heard F. de Ravignan preach at Notre-Dame without experiencing this first impression, and in my opinion no exordium to his discourse could surpass this in magnificence and effect."

The greatness of his character showed itself chiefly in the firm and noble carriage of the head, and in the burning and penetrating glances of his eye. Force had its seat in his broad high forehead. His eye was ordinarily mild and enticing, but it displayed flashes of genius, zeal, and, on occasion, menace. His habitual deportment was grave and serious, but his smile was gracious and prepossessing. The Bishop of Orleans justly remarked that "sweetness, the lively reflection of his heart, breathed in his looks and on his lips."

To this twofold indication of vigour and kindness must be added an air of noble sincerity, of heartfelt sympathy, of complete self-possession in all occurrences of life, of ease and kindness in all his intercourse with the world, of natural pride subdued by religious humility; and thus it will be understood that a countenance so grand and amiable was sure to strike the minds of the crowd, and to fix itself in the memories of all.

His style of address corresponded to his appearance. F. de Ravignan exercised a peculiar attraction in his discourses and conversations; there was such gravity and sweetness in the sound of his voice, his tone expressed such firmness and decision, his delivery was so clear and animated, that he seemed made to attract listeners. Some trace of solemnity was found even in his familiar language, or if not solemnity, a thoroughly natural dignity; but there was at the same time a simplicity attracting love, a vivacity full of expression and interest, an indescribable air of truth, frankness, and affection. His conversation was perhaps no less eloquent than his preaching; and, like St Francis Xavier, he excelled in the apostolic use of private interviews.

F. de Ravignan retained as much of the distinguished bearing of former times as was compatible with his profession, and as could in some sense adorn the person of a religious. He practised great simplicity, and even poverty, in his dress, but he was always perfectly free from dust or stain, and always tidy; his whole external bearing was grave and modest, with a mixture of old-fashioned politeness and a degree of grace really uncommon both among his brethren and in the world; he had learned the art of combining two characters, that of a perfect gentleman and that of a man of God.

As to his demeanour, manifold sprightliness covered in F. de Ravignan a basis of gravity. When occasion suited, he could put aside his natural seriousness, and he would manifest nothing but cheerfulness and enjoyment, just as if he had nothing to do and nothing to suffer. He was not deficient in humour; and hence, at the community recreations, he contributed to the pleasure of the

religious relaxation by giving interest to anecdotes and by graceful wit. He went so far as to urge some of his brethren to the same, drawing them by lively sallies to join in his gaiety.

We will finish our sketch of F. de Ravignan's external character, by passing from the peculiarities due to his natural qualities to those which arose from his virtues, and we shall see how his loftiness of mind, energetic character, and tender heart, were modified and kept within bounds by humility and charity, and the thoughts which faith suggests.

No man has ever lived who was better able to paint St Ignatius than St Francis Xavier, for no one had more opportunities of knowing him, nor was more able to comprehend what he knew. We read in history that the question was put to him, what it was that he loved and admired so much in this Father of his soul? The answer was, "His character. The character of Ignatius is a whole made up of three elements; a humility of mind which we can scarcely understand, a force of soul superior to all opposition, and an incomparable kindness of heart. On these three grounds, I declare him worthy to be loved by God and man."

This picture was repeated in F. de Ravignan; nor is it astonishing that the Son was like the Father. It is perhaps needless to remark, that we make no comparison of virtues and merits. We are not, however, drawing a parallel, but merely noticing a resemblance. Equality is one thing, likeness another.

While nature gave F. de Ravignan a soul that was lofty, and full of energy, modesty refined that soul; grace made him humble, and brought him to the perfection of all that is noble and lovely. "My dear and excellent Father," the General of the Society once wrote to him, "I see nothing to

blame in you except a little too much humility ; but as you tell me that these feelings are far from causing you any discouragement, and fill you with nothing but peace, confidence, and even joy, I have no more to say. *Ex fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos*—‘ By their fruits ye shall know them.’ ”

In the natural order, F. de Ravignan made no account of his talents and good qualities, and attached no value to his labours and services. He was never the first to speak of them ; and if from time to time questions were put to him, he answered with a modesty which commanded forbearance, a brevity which enforced silence. The accounts he gave of himself were full of diminutives. Thus some of his most familiar phrases were the following : “ My little undertakings—my little endeavours—my poor words—my miserable prosing—this work is one of the most mediocre possible—if it is worth while to mention it—if I am able to achieve anything—I am an old ruin, all wretched and falling into decay ; I hardly know who lives there, and I am always surprised that any one knocks at my door ; I know quite well that I neither say nor do anything that is any good, and there is no doubt Another speaks and acts in my place. I am nothing but a bad tool, in fact I am only in the way and an obstacle, and if God uses me and the letters I write, and gives consolation by them, if He works conversions by means of my words, His object is the better to show forth His power in my nothingness.”

It is of course very good to speak in this strain, provided one’s thoughts agree with one’s words. For it is possible to make a show of humility without feeling it, and to speak ill of one’s self, only in order that others may avenge the insult. The infallible test of sincerity is the wish to be really treated in accordance with one’s language, it is to

treasure up reproaches and even contumely like to that which is self-inflicted. Now, F. de Ravignan's behaviour agreed well with his language; it was almost a pleasure to give him reproofs, so happy and grateful was he for them.

He had once been warned of a small exterior defect: "Pardon, a thousand times," he answered, unhesitatingly, "for this and all my other faults. I do nothing but spoil God's work. What kindness and indulgence you show in reproving me in this manner! You really give me sensible joy. I will go and ask God for the grace to amend."

He had shown a friend in confidence some fragments of a little pious treatise at which he was working in his leisure moments; a plain answer was given him that the work seemed feeble, and not worthy of its author. The justness and freedom of this sentence delighted him; he at once took his pen to express his gratitude: "Your letter filled me with comfort and joy, for which I must thank you. God grants me something better, in liberty and rest: I bless Him for it: I shall have more time to devote to souls."

While some men who have attained to fame, or who wish to attain to it, preserve among their papers, and send down to posterity, only the compliments which are addressed to them, F. de Ravignan collected nothing but criticisms; he accepted them from every side, and kept them as memorials of a pleasure and a kindness.

This disposition was partly the result of perfect uprightness, partly of thorough abnegation. Advice and reproaches were always received either for the sake of justice or of humility; and on this latter title, they were always the more welcome the less they had of foundation. If the question touched himself only, he was at no pains to set up any defence, unless in answer to inquiry made by his

Superior. Even if there was fault found with his doctrine, and the attack was made in good faith, he showed no bitterness while defending what he had said, taking care not to allow charity to be wounded for the protection of truth.

An ecclesiastic sent him a long list of criticisms on one of his publications ; he replied by a short argument for his defence, of which I will cite only the opening lines. It would be well if no discussion deviated from this courtesy, so worthy of a Christian and a Frenchman.

“MONSIEUR L'ABBE,—I have read the paper you have been good enough to send me with scrupulous attention and deep gratitude. I assure you I shall always be glad to receive admonitions ; and whenever the warning comes from you, I shall feel real joy, for I shall know that the document I receive has been dictated by nothing but learning and piety combined with charity.”

The humble religious was often heard to say that he was astonished he was not driven from the Society. On his arrival at one of our Houses, he wrote : “I have been welcomed with the greatest attention and perfect charity, while it would have been right to turn me out of doors.” He often exclaimed : “How good God is to bear with my deep-seated, immense infirmities !” He was constant in attributing to himself every public or private misfortune. “I cannot help,” he wrote to the General, “thinking of my countless sins, and believing that it is I who bring all these misfortunes on the Society. At the same time I am so desirous of serving and helping it !” As often as he saw any of his Brethren in pain, he would say with a sigh : “This again is my fault ; you are a victim in my place, and I am smitten in your person. I

have brought misfortune on you : and what else am I doing anywhere or with anybody ? ”

Nevertheless, he received nothing but expressions of esteem and affection from all, both within and outside the Society ; this led him sometimes to turn to one of his Brethren, and say : “ You must be very much astonished at this, are you not ? and how is it to be explained ? you know me, and certainly you cannot understand it. But at any rate you will deal justly with me, and will hold me in contempt.” On this same Brother offering to accompany him on some walk, he answered, “ You ? you come with me ? Oh, how kind you are ! But how is it that you can endure my presence ? ”

After having made his Confession in the room of his Spiritual Father, he always prostrated himself with his face to the earth, and often pressed with his lips the feet of the priest who had given him absolution. We have witnessed him doing the same under other circumstances a hundred times, throwing himself on the ground before his Brethren and embracing their feet ; when Superior, he obtained the opportunity of doing this by command ; when a subject, by entreaty. It may easily be guessed which of the two found this the greater humiliation.

Humility, according to the promise of the Gospel, is the foundation of true greatness. This man, so full of self-contempt, showed himself superior to all natural emotions, to all the chances of life. Not a shadow of the fixed ideas engendered by self-love could be discovered in him ; whence it sprang that there was no uneasiness before acting, no complacency during the progress of the work, no boasting about success, no soreness at failure, no vexation or discouragement on meeting contradiction, no jealousy in presence of a rival, no resentment arising from injuries received. I am not sure that

he found it necessary to surmount these vulgar feelings: his battle was fought elsewhere, and had its place in a loftier region. When any one accused himself of weaknesses or temptations of this kind, or bewailed them to him, he disposed of them by a single word, just as the smallest movement drives off a fly: "Let it pass," he would say; "what are we? worthless leaves driven about by the wind."

As to the increase or falling off of reputation, indifference renders man superior to this, and he who is humble is indifferent. What was worldly glory, credit and favour among men, to this man so detached from himself? His heart was fixed far above these trifles. All his anxiety was reserved for matters of higher interest; he was free from the world and from himself, and cared only for the cause of God and the fate of souls.

To correct or complete our picture we must add, that, deep as this humility was, substantially there was no exaggeration seen in its form; it had a tendency to excess, but avoided all that was extravagant. F. de Ravignan possessed the art of guiding and restraining it within the bounds of prudence and discretion. Thus he did not allow his courage to be assailed and baffled by timidity and perplexities, nor by weakness and faintness of heart; nor did he expose his ministry to discredit or to loss of effect by ill-timed eccentricity or the affectation of unskilfulness. He thought nothing of men's good opinions, but he thought much of edification; it was noticed accordingly that he everywhere observed the rules of civility, and maintained his position with the ease and dignity of a man who respects himself.

In F. de Ravignan, the most self-reliant of the virtues served to introduce the most retiring, by which it in turn was moderated; the vigour which

humility softened was the second feature of his character. It will be sufficient to recall in general terms what we have already mentioned in detail : his constancy amidst continual strife ; the spirit he maintained throughout the labours of his ministry, notwithstanding his ceaseless yearning for solitude ; his unshaken bravery under persecution ; his modesty in the time of triumph ; his joy when attacked by sickness ; his courage in the anguish of desolation. He never knew fear nor showed signs of giving up. Obstacles and opposition did not even rouse him to emotion ; he had no need to put any unusual stimulus on his will, nor to force nature ; he required only to remain himself to ensure rising superior to his task. His faults, springing from surprise and impulse, only served to add strength to his resolution ; they were followed by so immediate and vigorous reprisals, that we may almost say there was glory in a fall which led to such a recovery.

It will be remembered that though constantly engaged in battles and skirmishes, he never gave way to feebleness or temerity ; in all his sickness of body and trouble of soul, he was far from complaining in the hope of attracting sympathy ; he went further, and showed himself jealous of the safety of his treasure, and kept the Cross close shut in his heart. And in all this there was nothing strained, especially nothing artificial ; his energy was easy and consequently durable. It was not the fitful course of a mountain torrent, but the equable flow of a river passing steadily onward, however its banks may vary. Finally, his courage was consummated in patience in the midst of great trials ; his naturally rigid character was never broken, but was softened under the Divine Hand ; and it may be truly said that he displayed the double power of action and suffering, the force of a soldier and that of a martyr.

A last stroke will give completeness to this sketch of F. de Ravignan's character and appearance. According to the beautiful expression of St Augustine, he went out of himself by humility, and dwelt in others by charity. He was generous and prodigal in doing services, full of invention and resource in procuring pleasure for his neighbour, but he never looked for any return; and his charity seemed most thoroughly satisfied when he was able to withdraw himself from the expression of gratitude. No less constant than tender in friendship, he never recalled an affection once bestowed. Faults and injuries did not drive him away, adversity served only to attach him more closely. His friends were numerous, and yet he gave so full a measure to each, that each had reason to esteem himself, not perhaps without companions, but without rivals in his mind. And it was true; there is always room in a great soul enlarged by the charity of Jesus Christ, and an Apostle's heart becomes all to all.

In concluding the present chapter, we may be allowed to make a digression which will have the effect of leading us naturally to the conclusion of this history. When F. de Ravignan was approaching the close of his career, some of his illustrious friends went before him to the grave. I will collect in this place some of these memorials of death. They will furnish us with the explanation of some lines which I meet with in one of the last letters he wrote: "I am growing old; there is a void forming in my soul and around me; it seems that there is an appointed time for spiritual isolation. God is our only Friend, our Companion; He suffices for all, in conversation with Him there is rest; all else is indifferent."

In 1852, the well-known and excellent physician,

M. Récamier, quitted this life at an advanced age without having known the infirmities of old age. His sudden departure left him time only to send to Heaven one cry of prayer. I borrow a few details from F. de Ravignan's correspondence: "We have had the misfortune of losing Dr Récamier, my old friend of thirty years' standing, who had constantly lavished on me the most devoted attention. On Monday, June 28, he was going about his ordinary occupations, and was perfectly cheerful and without pain, and in complete possession of all his faculties. He went out for a short time to visit a patient, lay down on his return, and slept for half an hour, and awoke in a fit of coughing and suffocation. A few moments after, all was over. He had only time to repeat twice or thrice the words, 'O God, have mercy on me!' He had been to Confession and Communion on the preceding Sunday. He was seventy-eight years of age."

While F. de Ravignan was under the influence of this unexpected death, he wrote some lines which must find a place in the present history; they will form a memorial of the gratitude felt by all members of the Society who were acquainted with the eminent and charitable physician: "I have certainly felt the loss of Dr Récamier very much. He was an unfailing friend of ours. He came among us several times a week, almost every day, prayed along with us in our chapel, and showed remarkable animation in telling us of any incident which he thought favourable or unfavourable to the interests of religion. It was impossible to help loving him. His original character, and his humorous sallies, bore the impress of the exhaustless goodness of his heart. He was full of primitive faith, and admirable charity towards the poor. He passed happily to a better life, and, as we hope, he is now receiving his recompense.

"This earth is only a land of temporary exile : we shall meet again elsewhere. Truly everything is arranged for detaching us from what passes away, and attaching us to that which abides. While our heart is here below, it cannot find complete satisfaction ; it is destined to possess God Himself. Why do we find so much trouble in preparing ourselves for this love of God which will never know an end ? This is a real mystery ; our nature has wandered out of its way, and we must bring it back by combat, by care, and by faithful generous efforts. But the crown and repose are waiting for us at the end."

These lines were addressed to the Count Molé, who was himself looking forward to the end of his pilgrimage here below. To die in the arms of F. de Ravignan was, I have reason to know, the highest desire of this eminent man. He was worn out with the prolonged agitation of political life, and with the secret disappointments attending lofty rank, though his life had a full share of the prosperity of this world ; but the noble old man found a place of rest when he came to know the heart of the religious, which was no less lofty and delicate than his own. A friendship which was not of this earth came to him as one of those final graces which place a crown on life in preparation for death. He went slowly down the slope of the hill, rendered calm by faith and bright in hope, conversing with the man of God on the vanity of all that is not immortal ; and he reckoned on passing from time into eternity, his hand clasped in the hand of his friend.

Heaven granted half only of his pious desire ; M. Molé did not survive F. de Ravignan, but he had not the priest by his side in his last hour. A little experience among souls sufficed to show that the soul of the pious old man had reached ma-

turity, and that the time had come for it to be gathered by the Lord of the harvest. On the morning of the 8th of November 1855, almost immediately on his return from receiving Holy Communion, he was sitting at the family breakfast-table, when he was noticed to fall forward ; he was carried to his bed ; he gave what strength was left to his last duties, and had time to bless his daughter the Marchioness de la Ferté-Mun, and his granddaughter the Duchess d'Ayen, to summon the Church to his side in death, and to honour God by the sacrifice of his life. It might be thought that one of the great historic names of France became extinct ; but in truth its glory has been secured from oblivion by the last Magistrate who bore it, and it will shine before God and men without possibility of eclipse for all eternity.

In the course of August 1857, Baron Augustin Cauchy came to the end of his long and pious career. His genius seemed to develop with years, and to grow in greatness up to the last moment ; it had gained him the name of the Newton of France. His ardent piety, joined with a simplicity now rarely met with, had endeared him to F. de Ravignan. I remember an anecdote which illustrates at once the frankness of the man of science and the humility of the religious. F. de Ravignan had alluded in the pulpit to some mathematical demonstration, and let fall an inaccurate expression. Scarcely was the sermon finished when M. Cauchy hastened up, and as soon as he caught sight of the preacher, cried out, " Father, you know so many things, and say them so well ; but please, never talk of what you do not understand." This more than dubious compliment was repeated more than once in the course of the conversation, so alive was the mathematician to the truths of his science, and so ardent his zeal for the honour of sacred elo-

quence. F. de Ravignan laughed heartily at the occurrence, and promised never again to trust himself in this treacherous region without first consulting his friend.

On the 18th of August 1857 the religious, who was himself labouring under an attack of sickness, wrote from Saint-Acheul an answer to M. Biot, who had apprised him of the death of their common friend :—

“MY VENERABLE AND VERY DEAR FRIEND,—
I I had not been ill, and confined to my bed for nearly three weeks, I should have hastened to write and thank you for the admirable letter you sent me concerning our pious and learned friend Cauchy; it is thoroughly characteristic of him and you. You resolved to make manifest to all, and in the best chosen terms, the close alliance existing in your soul between true science and true faith. I feel it to be one of the greatest blessings I have enjoyed on this earth, that I have known a person of your character, and that I have loved you tenderly, and cherished your friendship. I must close with this farewell; my sickness has left me still very delicate.”

I am glad to be able to do honour to the memory of the great geometrician by making public his latest thoughts and actions. The letter I am about to transcribe is more circumstantial than that of M. Biot could possibly be; it is written by an eyewitness, F. Coué, who was at the time Rector of the College of the Immaculate Conception at Vaugirard. “Reverend and dear Father,—M. Cauchy’s sickness, which had lasted for about ten days, began to give rise to serious apprehensions on Thursday, Ascension Day; F. Lefebvre was sum-

moned; he went to Sceaux that very day and heard his Confession. On the following day I went myself. I found him dozing, but when my name was mentioned he at once awoke. He told me how glad he was to see me; said a little about his health, smiling and quite calmly, and then spoke with great animation about the endowment at his expense of one of the Brothers of Christian Schools, and about the difficulties met with on the part of the municipal council. After I had promised to say Mass on the morrow for his intention, and was about to leave him, he asked me to give him my blessing.

“Meantime a message had been sent to ask the Curé to come and give him the last Sacraments. He was away from home, and his Vicaire also was absent. I was stopping at a house where I had left two of our scholars; they came to look for me, and I returned bringing with me the Holy Viaticum and the Holy Oils, which I left in the drawing-room. I then repaired to the dear patient, who was not aware of his critical position. On my remarking that I had returned in order to offer him a great consolation, that of receiving our Lord, he answered, ‘Oh, certainly; but I should like first that the great staircase up which our Lord will come, should be ornamented with all the most beautiful flowers in the garden.’ I told him that as there was but little time, I had already brought the Blessed Sacrament, but that all the flowers in the drawing-room should adorn his bedroom, and that his family would do their best in honour of our Lord. He did not insist, but said with beautiful simplicity, ‘Very well, Father, but I want to go to Confession.’ ‘You did so yesterday; there is no need.’ ‘I should like it, because F. Lefebvre had not much time to give me.’”

“During the administration of the Extreme Unction he made the responses to all the prayers and questions in the Ritual with really sublime simplicity, faith, and fervour. I was assisted by F. Billot, who had come from the Rue des Postes. The pious sufferer paid attention to every point ; he was afraid that his left ear had not been sufficiently bared, and that the Unction had not been applied properly. I assured him that there had been no mistake. When I told him to close his lips, he answered, ‘Willingly, Father.’ At the anointing of the feet, he was again afraid that it was not done rightly, and said to the Sœur de Bon Secours, who was attending him, ‘Both ought to be uncovered, and there is only one bare.’ After the ceremony he called me to him, and expressed some fear that he had not performed his penance properly. He was anxious to repeat it, and we did so by making a pious invocation.

“The time being come to give him the Holy Viaticum, he called me to him and said, ‘Father, I am not sure I shall be able to swallow the Host.’ Madame de Cauchy and his sisters thought that he would be able ; but not to thwart him, I gave him a small portion only, which he received with great reverence and with an angelic expression. Then he kissed the Crucifix devoutly, and answered the words of encouragement I addressed him by expressions of humility. After a few moments of recollection he called me to him and said, ‘Father, as a member of the Confraternity of St Vincent of Paul, I have a right to a plenary indulgence at the hour of death.’ ‘I gave it you before the Viaticum.’ ‘Oh, you did not tell me.’ ‘True ; well, for your edification, I will renew it.’ Lastly, I asked him whether he would not wish to imitate the Patriarchs, by giving his blessing to his family who were as-

sembled round him. He gave his consent. I took hold of his right hand and raised it over the group, and he said with great distinctness, *Benedictio Dei omnipotentis, Patris et Filii, &c.* I then quitted him, never to see him again on earth ; and I took back the Blessed Sacrament to the Church.

“ In the evening he received a visit from the Curé, who said on leaving, that he would pray God to restore him the health which was so valuable to his family, the poor, and to all the inhabitants of Sceaux. ‘Pray particularly,’ was the answer, ‘for the work of the Brothers: men pass away, but works abide.’ The Sister who was nursing him, said, ‘You are in pain. I pray God to give you relief.’ He answered, ‘No, I am not in much pain.’ So admirable was his patience, so genial his smile, so simple and full of kindness, it might well be believed that his sufferings were not great.

“ On Saturday, May 31, his daughter, Madame de l’Escalopier, wrote to me : ‘Our fears have been only too well realised. My Father preserved all his presence of mind until three in the morning, and about half-past three he pronounced the holy names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph ; for the first time he seemed aware of his critical state ; and about four o’clock he surrendered his soul into the hands of God with a tranquillity which left us in doubt as to our loss until the moment it occurred.’

“ Every one feels sure that the pious soul went straight to Paradise. At the Rue des Postes one of the Community said, ‘That good M. Cauchy ! he must have gone into heaven as he used to come into our rooms, without knocking at the door.’ At the funeral on Monday all the men of science and the devout persons who had come from Paris were full of recollection and deeply impressed. The Mayor of Sceaux drew forth many tears by a

few very Christian and sensible words. I saw poor artisans, poor women, poor girls, weep like children round this tomb in which their father, friend, and benefactor was laid."

The following month witnessed the death of Madame de Swetchine, a lady whose well-known name has already occurred more than once in the course of our history. A few days after, F. de Ravignan sent a letter full of lofty and touching lessons to a person who deeply felt this loss; we will give a portion:—"Your pious and illustrious friend," he wrote to the Countess de Gontaut-Biron, "has gone to a better life, and you have good reason for sorrow when you turn your thoughts to the place left vacant so near to your heart. We all disappear in like manner, and must all bid adieu to ourselves.

"But after our reasonable regret, which, to tell the truth, is nothing but compassion for ourselves; after the death of persons dear to us, but who are true Christians such as she was whom you lament, why should you not try to raise yourself to the great and consoling thoughts suggested by faith? In such cases we may continue to grieve over ourselves, for God allows it; but we must not begrudge heaven and eternity that which this miserable time has yielded to them. This beloved soul is saved; there is no room for doubting this; she is enjoying, or soon will enjoy, the vision of God and eternal beatitude; let us not afflict ourselves on her account. And as for ourselves, let us not be so full of self and of our own interests as to claim back from God and glory, beings whom we should prefer to retain with us amidst the miseries, sorrows, and afflictions of this life. You can and you ought—you are well able to do it—to feed yourself on true thoughts of faith in your regret for your venerable friend."

Might it not be said that the Apostle, in his

declining days, wished to teach his friends how to bear the sorrow which he was himself so soon about to cause them? When his hour came, men grieved for themselves, but rejoiced for his sake; there were tears in the eyes of all—heavenly joy in all hearts.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

LAST SICKNESS.—SAINT-ACHEUL.

F. de Ravignan's joy at leaving Paris—His Forebodings—Commencement and First Stage of his Sickness—The Infirmary in the Noviciate—Deceitful Recovery and Return to Paris—Retreat given to the Carmelites in the Rue de Messine.



DE RAVIGNAN went through his usual various employments in the winter of 1856 without any symptoms leading us to expect a sudden failure of his strength. He seemed tired with his work, but not worn out by old age. He still carried himself upright; his step was active, his voice clear and sonorous, his articulation distinct, and retaining its ring. There was a strong element of elasticity in his constitution, which yielded for an instant only to reinstate itself immediately; the vigour of the soul supported the body.

During the Lent of this year, he treated a cold with neglect, in order to give the usual Retreat to the Children of Mary. When summer came, he had still a choking cough, which was no doubt an early indication that the chest was giving way.

When the time came which is called in Paris the "dead season" of the sacred ministry, he felt a

greater need than ever to go and take his holiday, which on this occasion was the immediate fore-runner of his long rest. One of his Brethren at the Rue de Sèvres was anxious to induce him to visit a College to which he himself had been sent for relaxation; the answer was: "I am too much attached to you to think of throwing my wretched self upon you. Besides, a College and its bustle would be very far from suiting the desire of my soul and nature. A Noviciate is better adapted to my need of tranquillity. I shall ask in all simplicity to go to Saint-Acheul, and I shall there enjoy being left alone. I am so eager to get away! My people are all going into the country, and I hope to get off by the 30th of June. . . . Every family, every soul, is making its way to the end amidst trials and sorrows. We see nothing else all around us."

A nun of the Rue de Varennes still remembers the joy she noticed in F. de Ravignan at the time of this last departure from Paris. I must not omit copying the note she sent me:—

"It will be impossible to express the simple, almost childlike, joy felt by the good Father at the time of starting for his solitude. He began to rub his hands as he talked of it a month before; then he would count the days, and as the time drew near, he no longer restrained his happiness. On the 29th of June 1857, when he was on the point of leaving Paris on his way to Saint-Acheul, after he had said Mass that morning in the chapel of the Children of Mary, he remarked to me as we were passing through the garden on the way back to the house, 'I was to have set off to-morrow morning, but I have changed my mind; I have obtained leave to set off this evening, so as to have a day more. Leaving Paris, leaving noise for solitude, it does one good even to think of it! Can

it really be that, before long, I shall be alone, in silence?' I replied that he seemed very glad to get away from us. The good Father rejoined, with an expression of countenance which falsified his words, 'Oh yes, I am very glad. It is quite a treat to pass the first days in putting away every thought about you all, that I may afterwards be alone with God in the desert for two months. But be quite easy; I will not fast too much, and I will try to regain my strength for work next winter.'"

He continued to think of work in the middle of his rest at Saint-Acheul; and on July 23 he proposed to his Superior a plan for his exertions in the autumn: "The time is getting on," he wrote; "I should like to lay before you my little schemes for September.

"The Bishop of Orleans has twice written urgently to ask me for a Retreat. I have many reasons for wishing to undertake this work; you will understand that it would be a proper opportunity of proving that I retain a grateful remembrance of real services done me some time since.

"It has occurred to me also to ask you to let me give the next Retreat at Conflans. Lastly, I have your permission to give that at the Rue de Messine. I am very fond of this sort of ministry, which turns my thoughts to subjects connected with the contemplative life.

"If no accident occur, these three little Retreats, which are quite within my powers, might easily be arranged for September, or, if need be, October. I look forward to making my own Retreat in the early part of August. I shall return to Paris about the 25th or 26th of that month.

"We shall, I hope, meet again upon this earth."

In his letters of all kinds written at this time, we find here and there some forebodings of his approaching end, or rather deliverance. On the 30th

of July he wrote: "My solitude and rest is not a time of forgetfulness. On the contrary, I am calm and free here; and I seem to have more lively sense, when in prayer before our Lord, of the necessities of the souls dear to me, especially of such as are in suffering. Let us try to allow ourselves to be nailed alive to the Cross! death and deliverance will come in due time. . . . I seem to be aging, and to be not so well in health, though free from any particular disease. No rest will give me back the vigour belonging to the years that have passed. This remark is made in confidence."

This confidential hint having given rise to some alarm, he answered on the 10th of the same month: "You must not suppose that I am sick; my will continues to have the free disposal of my usual life, my work, my devotional practices; if only by God's grace I can apply my will with resolution. I am here quietly following the course of the days which God gives me, and I give most of my time to the Book of the Exercises of our Blessed Father. I taste deep peace, and find relish for it, not that I am conscious of or feel any sensible consolation. But I feel gratitude for these hours of freedom and peace which I receive from the Sacred Heart. Pray that I may benefit by them.

"After all, we are on our way to the end. Oh! when will it come?"

At length, on the 23d of July, he sent the last news of himself: "I feel that old age has come upon me, and I must bethink me of how to bear the weight of years. Shall I be able to go on doing the little I have hitherto done? I do not know; but I put myself without reserve in God's hands. . . . Let us pray, and give ourselves up to the Divine Will."

Towards the end of July, after an excessively hot season, the sickness which was to take him to

heaven showed itself by an attack of neuralgia; there was continued and aggravated nausea. The early symptoms soon led the way to serious illness; the nervous complaint became organic; asthma was suspected, but the disease was consumption.

The duties of infirmarian were performed by one of the novices, whose charity earned the gratitude of the patient. He drew up an account of what he witnessed; and I make use in this history of the journal of Saint-Acheul.

When F. de Ravignan first felt the attack, he frequently repeated, "If only God would take me, and rid the earth of my presence!" The physician spoke of his getting over it; but he answered, "Why do they not rather talk to me of dying? It is so good to die and go to see God! *Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo*—'I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.'"

He still entertained hopes of leaving his bed on the last day of July to say Mass on the feast of St Ignatius. But on that very day he became much worse than before; he submitted to foregoing the happiness as a penance with calm resignation, and only said, "Our Blessed Father is just, but he is severe." Towards evening he dismissed his young attendant, to enable him to be present at the Benediction, with a simple commission: "Pray to St Ignatius, who has treated me severely, as I deserved, to pardon and bless me."

The Holy Communion was brought to him every evening for several weeks. The patient showed the activity and watchfulness, and the love of order descending to the minutest points, which had become habitual to him and was so marked a feature in his character, and he directed all the preparations for the pious ceremony in person; he watched from his bed the smallest details, and arranged how everything was to be put in its

place. As soon as the Blessed Sacrament entered he became motionless, with eyes fixed on the Host, and wearing an expression of reverent faith and hopeful love.

Every morning he caused the infirmary window to be opened, which communicated with an adjoining chapel, and was very particular to be told what feast was kept that day : he followed the priest at the altar with his eyes, and united his heart with the Holy Sacrifice, and the intentions of the Church.

He never failed in the course of the day to read a chapter of the Imitation of Christ. This little book was his companion in life and death. Towards evening he would say to the young novice, "Now say the Litany of our Blessed Lady; it will do me good. Perhaps I shall not always answer at the responses, but I shall unite my intention."

We have already remarked that F. de Ravignan had a strange yearning for suffering; he dwelt upon and made much of it, as others relish pleasure. Humility led him to have a feeling of expiation connected with all he suffered; but this penitent thought did not at all diminish his confidence: he humbled himself as a criminal under our Lord's Hand, but he rested as a son on His Sacred Heart.

When there was a crisis of his complaint, and an attack of pain, he said calmly, "God in His goodness allows all this for the expiation of my sins. His holy will be done! The Cross is pleasing: *O bona Crux*. We must try to be able to say this. May God and His holy Cross be our helpers! *In Cruce salus*—Salvation is in the Cross, it is nowhere else. Every man finds his own Calvary. But how difficult it is to allow one's-self to be fastened with the nails! It is the *satis pati*—the expiatory suffering—of Purgatory, where no thought or affection has power to make the soul forget the pain by which it is wholly occupied. Let us make

an offering of all our pains to stay God's vengeance, which the crimes of men provoke. . . . I do not think it possible that I shall recover, but I may be deceived. Once more, may the will of God be done! Moreover, it is the pleasantest course. I beg God not to let me languish on this earth, staying here without being any use. However, let everything happen to me according to His will! I will make a small change in the saying of St Teresa: *Et pati et mori*—'Both to suffer and to die.' That is my wish."

The following expression became a maxim for him, and was often repeated: "To labour is to pray; but to suffer is better still."

F. de Ravignan's character was seen more than ever in his sickness; he had never shown more fortitude or more affection. He had always been polite to perfection, but his politeness now became gracious delicate charity. So far from complaining, he commiserated the sufferings of others, and never thought that he had thanked them enough.

When the young infirmarian was getting anything ready for him, he invariably said, "Excuse my giving you the trouble, my dear Brother. May our Blessed Father recompense you, and count the steps you take!"

One night he rang the bell louder than usual; the novice hastened to him, and asked whether he had been obliged to ring more than once. "Oh no, my dear Brother," he replied; "you have answered, like Samuel, at once, 'Here am I, Father.'" Another time he awoke him to ask for some medicine which it was not absolutely impossible for him to have taken unassisted. As soon as he noticed it, he exclaimed, "What have I been thinking of? I was very thoughtless. I beg your pardon, my dear Brother, a thousand times."

He frequently asked whether there were any

other sick in the house, and on being told one day that two of the Scholastics had fallen ill, he said, "Poor young men! it is to such as them that God must give back health. We are growing old. It is time for us to go away, to make room for others, young people, to take our place. How fortunate you are that you have come into the Society! Of course you will have some trials to undergo, some times of difficulty to get through; but what a happiness it is to live and die in the bosom of our affectionate Mother!"

One of the community always stayed with him at night, taken alternately from the Novices and those Scholastics who were studying classics. When the turn came for the last-named, he would say cheerfully, "Now we are going to have some literature." In the morning, he always asked the infirmarian to thank his companions of the night: "Tell them that they have been very attentive and very skilful."

Every five minutes it was necessary to renew a bandage of iced water round the invalid's head; and as he could not bear any light, this little operation had to be performed in almost perfect darkness. Once it happened that one of the Novices was taking off the bandage, and caught hold of some of the hair; he was anxious to be quick, to avoid tiring the invalid by disturbing him so repeatedly, and he pulled with some force. The Father said nothing, just as if he had felt nothing; and when the operation was over, he turned to the poor novice, who was full of confusion at his awkwardness, and said kindly, "Thank you, my dear Brother."

The physician had on one occasion prescribed a course of treatment which did not seem to do any good. The invalid expressed a wish to try another plan; but he gave up at once on hearing the phy-

sician's answer. He soon began to reproach himself for giving vent to a desire dictated by nature, and that very day he sent the infirmarian to beg the physician to excuse his resistance to his orders.

He often asked the novice infirmarian's leave to do or to omit something, saying, "By our Rule you are my Superior, and I owe you obedience."

Noticing that his young nurse was always at his side, he said from time to time, with great earnestness, "My dear Brother, what a deal of trouble I give you! Come, I want to try to get some sleep; leave me alone." But soon he would call him back, saying with a smile, "No, I do not want you to go; your being here does me good."

The infirmarian himself fell ill, and was obliged to take to his bed. F. de Ravignan was better than usual, and crawled to the novice's little room: "It is now my turn to attend on you," he said; "it is only just. My poor Brother, how much you suffer. I will come to you at night too. I will station myself there, close by your side. What orders has the physician given about you? I want to cure you." He set about preparing the medicine, and took it to the novice.

F. de Ravignan had said, "I hope the Blessed Virgin will have pity on me, and allow me to say Mass on the feast of the Assumption." He gained his wish. His old friend, Mgr. Boudinet, Bishop of Amiens, had been to visit him several times during his sickness; he continued to come during the period of recovery. On one occasion he was accompanied by Mgr. Pallu du Parc, the Bishop of Blois. The first time the sick man left his bed, he was supported on the arm of the latter prelate, and once again joined the community. The Fathers and Novices who were gathered round Father Provincial began clapping their hands on his coming into the public recreation room. But he raised his

hand with a most expressive gesture, and put a stop to this mark of respect. Father Provincial stepped forward to receive him, and said, "Reverend Father, your presence doubles the joy we feel on this occasion."

Some notes written by F. de Ravignan during his convalescence, will show us on what pious thoughts he fed his heart. I will quote what seems to me of most value, making no distinction but that of date. We shall thus have his meditations and feelings laid bare before us day after day.

"Saint-Acheul. Sunday, Aug. 30, 1857.

"What affection of the soul is that which includes, or at least supplies the place of, all others? that interior disposition to which our Lord seems to be constantly leading me by one of His choicest graces, and which He seems to ask from me in an especial manner?

"It is to be satisfied with God, and, for His sake, to rejoice at whatever happens: at the sufferings He sends me, the uneasiness and uncertainty in which I am left, at the prospect of improvement in my health, and the relief which has been given me; in short, in blind filial resignation, rejoicing and being content for God's sake.

"To throw the past, and its burdensome memories, into the infinite abyss of God's indulgence and mercy; to entertain no fear nor fixed views for the present and future; this is to have peace and joy in faith; this is to die happily, and to live in glad devoted submission; it is the disposition most agreeable to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

"Interior bitterness, acute pain, an asthmatic chest, a sinking both of body and mind, continued want of sleep, and silly wanderings in the imagination—all this goes for nothing, and is lost in an act of filial resignation, and in the supernatural con-

tentment which God grants to the soul, to lead it to accept and be pleased with all the designs and action of our Lord.

"My God, my Saviour! grant me this contentment, and preserve me always in it, in this patient resignation, that by it I may abide in Thee. *Ego in Te et Tu in me.*"

"*Thursday, Sept. 3, 1857.*—It is strange. In my sickness and my convalescence, the wanderings of my imagination have always turned in the direction of the same chimerical fancy. What silly absurdity, inexpressible folly! It leads my waking dreams hither and thither, filling them with enchanted palaces, honours, and pleasures, in the midst of which I always practise humility and abnegation. And God gives up my poor sick head to these chimeras. It is nothing—a mere empty dream, which does not hinder my remaining content before God, and being united to Him in prayer, amid however much distraction. And then, humbled, and urged by reason and will, which remain sound and untouched, I turn continually to God, and beg from Him deliverance from these follies.

"Patience. *Conjungere cum Deo et sustine.* Just now I read over again that second chapter of Ecclesiasticus which F. Roothaan pointed out to me, for the time of trial and interior troubles. *Sustine*, endure, bear all, and wait: such is the law and the remedy.

"After all, what am I? A reed shaken by every wind. It bends to the right, it bends to the left, or always to the same side, at the caprice of the changing blast. Such, oh my God! is man, and yet Thou dost bless him. A deliberate, devoted will, and prayer, are alone of importance.

"In Thee, oh Lord, I will rest in every place and time, and under every influence, and I will wait. *Amen.*"

“ *Tuesday, Sept. 8 : Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin.*—Interior joy is really the life of faith; it is the best path. To follow it undeviatingly, fixed attention is necessary, and a constant habitual tendency of the will to rejoice at everything for God, even at the faults the remembrance of which gives most pain.

“ In this manner a firm and lasting footing, as far as is possible, is gained on a basis solidly and really supernatural. Self is resolutely renounced, and all selfish inclinations are contemned and put aside, all imaginings and distractions. It is well, very well; it is abnegation.

“ There is also mortification when we no longer seek ourselves. It costs something to gain spiritual joy in God; we wish for so many sensible joys belonging to nature and the heart of flesh.

“ It is also the purest and most truly disinterested love. Our happiness comes from God and is in God; not from self nor in self. We enjoy all that God has been pleased or now pleases to do; everything goes well. I will love and rejoice in this manner in the superior portion of my mind, and for the rest, I will allow my body and soul to suffer with calmness.

“ Oh, the great grace of joy of mind!

“ It is a grace, and a very great grace. We may and ought to desire and beg for it, and use it in the degree to which its inspirations dispose us. *Fiat.* Why should I, in sickness, and rendered unworthy by sin, why should I have received, sometimes at least, this grace, if not that I might cooperate with it with courage and tranquillity.”

“ *Wednesday, Sept. 9, 1857 : The Feast of Blessed Peter Claver.*—*Weariness* may be encountered in connection with the tendency interiorly communicated to the soul, inclining it constantly towards

supernatural content and joy of mind. Weariness received a kind of consecration, as a trial of souls, in the Garden of Olives.

"It may be caused, or at least maintained, by a half voluntary sloth; it must be overcome by labour. Forced inaction is another very natural source of weariness.

"And yet the power of grace is so great, the divine scheme of giving assistance to men is so full of mercy, that even in time of forced inaction, under the trial and temptation of sloth and weariness, a strong will is able to rise to joy of mind, to content in God. There is no inconsistency here. The Beatific Vision in the soul of our Lord during His Agony solves many a problem.

"But here we find something strange. Is it true that we are able to remain always in a state of joy even under the influence of weariness? It is true, and in a sense we are bound so to remain; this is what St Paul says, *Gaudete in Domino semper: superabundo gaudio in omni tribulatione*, 'Rejoice in the Lord always; I abound with joy in every tribulation.'

"This is a grace, a supernatural gift. Is it an exceptional state? No. I am deeply convinced that the only obstacle to joy of the mind lies in ourselves, in our own wilful and wholly natural way of reasoning, in our clinging to things that are subject to sense and change, and our voluntary struggle against our troubles; in our remembrances, and anticipations. Invariably forget everything as far as you can, and throw yourselves on pure joy of mind. This is the experience of the most miserable and guilty of men."

"*Sunday, Sept. 13: Feast of the Holy Name of Mary.*—*Sustine*, endure, endure yourself, this is the difficulty, but at the same time it is the most excellent course. It is the life and joy of the

mind ; it is battle, and it is peace. How precious a gift !

“ In order to endure, and endure oneself, according to the word *sustine*, we must try in the morning, at the first instant of reason awaking, faithfully and courageously to lift our mind and heart on high, *Sursum corda ! quæ sursum sunt querite*—‘ Lift up your hearts ; seek the things that are above ; ’ we must, for and in all things, throw ourselves wholly on God, and resign ourselves to Him. We must renew and maintain this valuable disposition as frequently as possible during the day ; especially it should have a principal place in our prayer.

“ The soul will soon sink down, a natural inclination will carry it to things that are low, human, sensible ; the imagination will wander over chimerical fancies. But calm determination will take us back to heaven, that close to God we may endure ourselves, rejoice and be content in Him. All else remains below. In pain and disability we must wait, and act as best we can. But we must always tend upwards.”

Let us return to consider his state of health ; I find an account of it in the letters which he sent to the Superior at the Rue de Sèvres.

On the 20th of August he wrote :—“ Since the 15th I have been able to resume saying Mass almost every day, not it is true without feeling fatigue. I go down to the garden for a short time, and I take some food. They tell me I am recovered, and they believe it ; it may be so, but I confess that my own impression is the reverse. The principal seat of the disorder is in the chest. Voice and breath alike fail me ; it tires me to try to speak low. I am troubled with cough and phlegm. I am without sleep, appetite, or strength ; and it seems to

me that naturally speaking this constitutes a marked decline, and is the beginning of the end ; but perhaps I shall have a long time yet of useless languishing and waiting. My happiness would be to come quickly to the end ; I feel a great, an over-great desire for it. Such is the impression I have formed about my state. I have not mentioned it to any one here ; what would be the good ? Of course it is clear that I may be deceived.

"If my present state continue, it seems quite impossible, subject to the will of my Superiors, that I should return to Paris for the winter. What should I do there ? only give you trouble. While here I at least serve to try the Novices. The greatest attention has been and still is shown by all around me.

"I suppose it will be best that all this should be between ourselves. Farewell on the Cross ! God grants me His favours in my sickness, by peace and even joy."

On the 27th, after mentioning that his *worn-out old chest* was beginning to have a little more voice, and to breathe with less difficulty, he added, "What will be the upshot ? Whatever God pleases. But as for praying for health and life, I have no inclination to do it. I desire to depart from this lower world. Still, if God gives me fresh strength, I shall receive it with gratitude and love, to devote it to His service and the good of souls."

His letter of the 5th of September announced a marked improvement : "It would appear that God wills that which you wish. I am really going on much better ; I have almost got back my strength as well as my voice. But I have a little cough left. I have great hopes that I shall return to-morrow to the community life ; and if nothing extraordinary occurs, I reckon on returning to Paris about the time when you yourself are to return.

My dear Father, my heart will find real consolation in being again near you. Beg our Lord that I may repair the past, and no longer be so heavy a burden to your indulgent friendship."

On the 15th of September the improvement had been maintained: "I am really in good health, and our Lord seems to make me stronger every day. I may say that I am substantially better than I was when I left Paris. Even the asthmatic symptoms are diminishing. I get out of breath with going up-stairs, or mounting a hill; that is all. I no longer get tired with talking. Just now I feel something of a wish to give up my idle life, for which there is no longer any reason. Thanks be to God, I have returned to our community life.

"What will become of us? *Amanti sapiunt omnia*—To him that loves, all things are sweet."

When the news spread in Paris that F. de Ravignan was about to return, one of his penitents, a lady distinguished alike for her noble name and noble heart, felt uneasy at seeing the convalescent resume his habits and ministry sooner than was right, and wrote to him on the subject. He sent his answer on the 16th of September, the day before his setting out:—"You may rest assured that God is not pleased with your over-great anxiety about my health. I know that it springs from your good, your too good heart; you put no bounds to your interest and devotedness, and I am affected by it, and deeply touched. But here I must summon the thoughts that become a Christian soul and the views of faith. In conformity with these perfectly supernatural views and principles, be quiet, and let F. de Ravignan follow his Superiors' orders, and do whatever they think they can allow him. My health is good; I shall take care of myself while I obey my rule and the recommendations of my Superiors. But after giving it a moderate

share of attention, I certainly shall not be very anxious about this wretched carcase. It is a slave ; it ought to work and suffer. As to what it finds impossible—well, it will not do that ; but whatever it can accomplish, my heart and mission as a priest and religious require and demand that it should be done, and the body will lend itself to the work.

“As your Father, your Friend, your Brother, I beg of you not to give way to this anxiety, and not to make others share your uneasiness ; you know how much annoyance it gives me. Say with faith : ‘F. de Ravignan intends working, preaching, hearing confessions ; he is quite right ; he ought to do all he can. Health and life are nothing but instruments for the service of God ; and the right course for him to take is that of sacrificing himself for God.’ ”

On F. de Ravignan’s return to Paris he seemed to have really recovered. It is true that he still felt habitual oppression and had frequent fits of coughing ; but these symptoms were inconvenient rather than dangerous, and were attributed to the asthma ; the unwearied labourer gave no heed to suffering so long as he was able to work. Accordingly, he resumed his ordinary course of life, the youthfulness of his heart reviving at the moment that his end was at hand ; never had his will been fuller of energy, nor his cheerfulness greater. There was but one of his dearest habits that he was forced to give up. Violent perspiration occurred every night, and in the morning he was found perfectly bathed in sweat ; it was thought necessary to forbid him to make the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament between rising and meditation, in which he had never failed while his health continued good.

One of the first occasions on which he went out in Paris was when he made a pilgrimage to the crypt

of St Denys, then recently discovered among the buildings of the Carmelites in the Rue d'Enfer. He had himself, in the course of the preceding year, preached the sermon on occasion of the re-establishment of this old sanctuary, to which St Ignatius and St Francis Xavier had so often repaired to pray. Mgr. Sibour, whose pious memory fills us with sorrow, was good enough to preside at the ceremony; and on the 1st of December 1856, scarcely a month before he was laid in the vaults of the old Cathedral, he renewed the blessing of the catacomb, in which the First Bishop of Paris rests.

Towards the end of September, F. de Ravignan studiously took what share he could in the Retreat at the Noviciate at Conflans: one of his Brethren replaced him in giving the Instructions, but he assisted in hearing the Confessions.

In the course of October he at length found opportunity for his summer retreat, which he had missed in the month of August. "I have secured it at last," he said with joy. It was clear that he received more encouragement than ever from his Blessed Father, whose Spiritual Exercises he was making for the last time. A person who was sufficiently familiar with him to venture on a question put in a playful form, said, "My dear Father, I always tell you something about my retreat; you ought to tell me something about yours." He answered kindly:—"My retreat? I had wings in prayer! Oh God, Thy goodness is infinite. . . . When I say wings in prayer, you will understand what I mean. I have been raised a little by grace. Some relief has been allowed to my weak nature after my sickness; I have need of it."

He spoke of this retreat in the following terms, in a letter written with the greatest openness:—"I have again been clearly convinced that familiar love

for our Lord is what must withdraw us from being occupied by earth, and by natural and sensible affections. Great and blessed is this liberty, this freedom of heart, this precious craving of the interior life! But it is grace, and we must pray for it, and beg for it earnestly. To be constant and earnest in begging for this grace constitutes detachment and thorough peace and union with the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

"It would be well if we could once for all embrace and make our own that golden maxim which forms the conclusion of the Second Week of the Exercises: 'Let every one understand that his advancement will be proportioned to the extent to which he shall put off his own will, self-love, and the search for ease.' Beg this grace for me. Why should our thoughts be engrossed by anything but pleasing God, and uniting ourselves to Him alone?"

"My solitude has been uninterruptedly calm and peaceful, perhaps too much so. Prayers were offered for my poor soul; I felt it clearly; God filled me with joy, confidence, and indifference. The time of deliverance will come; the blessed moment, the hour never sufficient to be desired. When shall we reach it?"

All the inclinations which he had had throughout life seemed to gain new vigour as he approached his end; and the ripeness they attained as he drew near to heaven is a clear sign that they came from God. He had strength enough to go in a carriage from the Rue de Sèvres to the Carmelite House in the Rue de Messine. "I am going there," he said, "to breathe the air of the desert; it is my Conflans in Paris. There is nothing that gives me so much pleasure or rest as to talk to these great black phantoms sitting motionless behind their *grilles*; I tell them in every tone by turns that they are the happiest women upon earth; I even venture to tell

them that they are too happy ; for if I found myself in a 'solitary cell with a *grille* to defend me, I would set sorrow at defiance. . . . But no, no, my Saviour ; Thou has called me to be Thy follower through the towns and villages. It is all well."

He seemed at this time to be labouring under a severer attack than usual of what he called his home-sickness. "They might as well have let me leave here below," he often repeated. "I have wished for it very much, I confess ; I owe my friends a grudge for it, and on this point the holiest are the most guilty. But perhaps it is nothing at all but a coward's views and feelings. Pardon me." For his own consolation he added : "Living and dying are very much alike, when a person gives himself up with thorough abandonment to the interior direction of our Lord. Let us then live and die in abandonment to His Spirit and His love."

Occasionally, when he happened to meet a person who would be sure to understand the language of his country, he would say : "Come, let us talk a little about that place, the country where there is no more of the world."

In a last instruction given to the community of the Sacred Heart in the Rue de Varennes on the 29th of October, he took for his subject *Seek God*, and he explained this constant seeking for God as follows :—"It is the constant toil of the will disengaging itself from all that is human and natural, to follow the suggestions made by faith. Let us mount to God by prayer, by aspirations of soul, by efforts of our will seeking to unite itself with the will of God. Let us free ourselves from the strong fetters which keep our soul in captivity. Let us never cease one instant to seek for God, to tend to Him, to aspire after His Life, His uncreated Light ; and when this search, without failing in fidelity, becomes less active and less toilsome, then let us

learn to rest in God, to renew ourselves to gain new strength in God : and strong with the strength of God, we shall enjoy God even amid the weariness of exile, finding and possessing Him in proportion to our earnestness in the search we have made for Him here below in the course of our pilgrimage."

Finally, from the 12th to the 21st of November, F. de Ravignan gave the retreat which he had promised to the Carmelite Nuns of the Rue de Messine. He had already preached the panegyric on St Teresa at the Carmelite Convent in the Rue de l'Enfer, on the feast-day, October 15. Thus the last sounds of his voice were to be given to St Teresa, and I am glad of the honour thus done to that great soul who loved the Society so well, and who was canonised by the Church on the same day with St Ignatius and St Francis Xavier.

At the conclusion of this retreat, which was the destined close of his ministry, he said : "It has given rest to my soul. It was so new and interesting a study for me to adapt the Exercises to Carmel. I tried to make true Apostles out of all these silent, solitary victims ; it is in fact their spirit ; it was clearly the spirit of their mother, St Teresa. I did not spare them, but told them the truth about sacrifice, penance, detachment, and suffering. I gave myself full scope. We were a hundred leagues from the earth and the world : giving a retreat like that is a long journey : but the pity is, we must come back." His eyes had been turned to heaven, but as he pronounced the last words he dropped them to the ground.

F. de Ravignan's preaching was over ; in a few days he heard his last Confessions.



CHAPTER XXIX.

HIIS DEATH.

F. de Ravignan is taken ill in his Confessional in Paris—Passes his last Days in Solitude—Journal of his Sickness—His last Letters—Visits paid to him—The Last Sacraments—His Agony.



THE apostolic life of F. de Ravignan was destined to be closed by an act of self-devotion and sacrifice. On Thursday, the 26th of November, he went as usual to hear Confessions in the Chapel of the Sacred Heart, in the Rue de Varennes. A lady had asked to see him in the parlour; she had intended to converse with him at some length, but she found him so exhausted that she said no more than, "One word, Father: tell me the name of one of your German Fathers in the Rue Lafayette; there is a poor Protestant woman to be converted." He answered, "Why do you not ask me myself to undertake it? do you think I am not worthy of so good a work?" "Oh, Father," she replied, "I should never have ventured to think of you, you are so busy and so much fatigued. Besides, it is only a poor old woman who gets her living by teaching German; and you have all these great people of Paris round you, and no one could supply your place with them."

F. de Ravignan listened to what she said, but when he heard her give these reasons as her excuse, he began to look so serious, that the applicant, who had been disconcerted at the beginning of her interview, instinctively retired towards the door. "Can it be true?" he at length exclaimed, in a tone that recalled the memory of the orator of Notre-Dame, "can it be true that you, a Christian lady, come and use such language in the presence of a priest of God? Have you not yet learned to understand the value of a soul? What difference does it make whether it is the soul of a poor old woman or the soul of a duchess? Were they not all created by the same God, redeemed by the same Cross, destined for the same beatitude?"

The poor lady's only fault was awkwardness in an attempt to be charitable: "Whatever you like, Father," was her answer, "whatever you like." "Very well," he said, with a smile: "your penance shall be to bring the poor German woman to me next Thursday, at the Convent of the Sacred Heart; and you must come early, that I may have the more time to give her."

On the following Thursday, the 3d of December, the Feast of St Francis Xavier, F. de Ravignan reached his post at two o'clock, and asked of the Sister Portress whether the German lady had come. Hearing that she was there, he directed that she should be taken to the parlour, and the great people told to wait at his Confessional door. He greeted the old Protestant with that hearty politeness which is nothing but the expression of charity; he made her sit down on a sofa, and himself remained standing, with his elbow leaning on the corner of the mantelpiece.

The interview lasted more than an hour, and began with argument; but the priest followed his usual practice, and after having shortly replied to the sophisms and prejudices of the other by simple

explanations and by appeal to facts, he spoke to the heart of the poor heretic in a manner so full of compassion and persuasive power, that instead of objections, she had nothing but tears. When she had in some degree recovered from her emotion, she related that some time before she had been giving lessons in German in Paris to a young American, who had begun to lead a disorderly life ; she was requested by the mother of the unhappy young man to bring him back to proper conduct, and, Protestant as she was, she found no better means of accomplishing this than applying to F. de Ravignan, who at the time was preaching at Notre-Dame. She herself took all the necessary steps to bring about the meeting ; the prodigal went to call on the Father, was converted, and on Easter Day received Holy Communion from the hands of his deliverer. Shortly after, he found himself at the point of death in the flower of his age, and far from his country ; he summoned his old instructress in German, and after thanking her for the salvation which she had procured him, he gave her a Crucifix, rosary, and medal of our Blessed Lady, which F. de Ravignan had given him, begging her to transmit these signs of salvation and pledges of eternal hopes to his mother in America, to be kept by her in remembrance of her son. Thus she had once brought blessings to a soul ; Heaven recompensed her good work.

It was now three o'clock. The good German went away, unable to say more than repeat the words, "He is an Apostle, an Apostle." Her agitation caused her to feel faint, and it was necessary to send some one to accompany her home.

Tired as F. de Ravignan was by this first conversation, he went to begin new work in his Confessional. Here sickness was awaiting him. No better day could have been chosen, nor place, nor time ; his death began on the feast of St Francis

Xavier, in the sanctuary of the Sacred Heart, and while he was engaged in the exercise of his holy ministry. The soldier of Jesus Christ truly died at his post. On the 3d of December 1795, he had been brought by baptism on to the arena of Christian conflict; on the same day, sixty-two years after, he laid aside the weapons of a Priest and an Apostle.

This long conversation left F. de Ravignan heated, and he got a chill in his Confessional. Shivering came on. Symptoms of illness soon showed themselves; he felt his strength failing through fatigue and pain. He nevertheless continued to hear some Confessions, and one of his penitents attests that he spoke more than ever like a man who no longer belongs to this world. "The Cross and trials," he said, "give us detachment, purity, and instruction: let us love them, and rejoice in every suffering that comes. You must grow little, and forget yourself, and lose yourself in God: you will find in Him silence of heart, the desert of the soul." At length, he was forced to give up his resistance to the attack; he left earlier than usual, and had much difficulty in reaching the Rue de Sèvres on foot.

For some days after this, the illness did not present any very marked character; it was an alternation, or rather a mixture, of various seemingly opposite affections. There was nausea, oppression of the chest, fever, and pain in the side. It was thought that there was nothing to deal with beyond an attack of asthma complicated by a fit of his neuralgia. It had, moreover, become common to see F. de Ravignan attacked by these acute but passing disorders. In a note written on the 6th of December, he used the following terms to reassure a pious person who was constant in praying to God that he might be preserved:—"I have a trifling, a very trifling attack of sickness. St

Francis Xavier sent me to bed. Do not say anything about it to the doctor if you see him."

On Monday the 7th, and Tuesday the 8th of December, the piety of the invalid supplied him with strength, and he was able to say Mass at six o'clock in the morning; but his great weakness, and the now constant perspiration, forced him to return straight to his room to make his thanksgiving. Thus it happened, that he offered his last Mass on the day when the Church celebrates the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. The champion of this glorious privilege of our Lady could not leave the altar on a better day. From this time forward, one of our Fathers took him Holy Communion every morning before the five o'clock Mass; and a little later, his sickness continuing, his Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris was good enough to allow Mass to be celebrated in his room; and from that time to the last day of his life, he received the Host from the hands of the priest who had consecrated in his presence.

Meantime, his disease was not slow in declaring itself. The oppression suddenly became extremely great; the least movement brought on fits of suffocation; the physician made out the presence of effusion on the right lung. Respiration was carried on by the left lung only, which itself had been out of order since his illness in 1852, for there was adhesion to the walls of the chest, and it was in some places unexpanded and disorganised. The excellent physician Cruveilhier, whose religion, learning, and devoted and lasting friendship make him so like his master, De Récamier, was obliged to have recourse to active expedients to arrest the progress of the disease.

Thus the tortures due to the medical art were mingled with the suffering arising from the complaint itself. Blisters and cupping-glasses were

applied incessantly, so that shortly no room could be found for new wounds except the scars of the old. The result was not satisfactory: it is true that the oppression, which had been increasing, seemed to diminish a little; but there was no effort of nature towards recovery. The sleeplessness, perspiration, and fever remained as before, and the evil, which had previously been going on with rapidity, seemed only to have checked its pace. The delicate sensitive constitution of the invalid, enfeebled and excited as it then was, caused him to feel the more pain from these remedies, to which he submitted in a spirit of obedience and penance. "It is well," he said—"it is well: the remembrance of sufferings is consoling; they are a part of our life that counts for something, and gives great relief to our poor souls."

Still hope continued to prevail over fear. F. de Ravignan himself did not seem to have any fixed opinion as to the result of the attack. It is true that he was constantly expressing an ardent desire to die; but he would occasionally talk of his recovery as possible, and the useless life which, in this case, he had before him, was in his eyes the greatest pain that Heaven could inflict.

From the beginning of his illness, his habitual inclination for solitude became an unconquerable craving. He had formerly said, "Silence or death;" now he wished for both together, and before being lost in God, he hid himself with Him. In compliance with his wish, his room remained closed all the day, and the key was put in a safe place; the Superior and the Brother Infirmarian alone were able to enter at any time they pleased into this sanctuary of prayer and suffering. I alone knew his feelings as his end approached, and I will relate in all simplicity what I saw and heard.

During the first two months we had very inti-

mate conversations, but as they had no particular character, I did not keep any note of them, and their very number prevents their being distinguishable in my memory. We talked together as we had done of old, as if we had the prospect before us of long continuing to do the same.

Towards the end of the month of January, I spoke to him of beginning my annual retreat, which his illness had somewhat delayed. "Yes, certainly," he at once replied; "do so; go into thorough retirement. It will be a rest for me to know that you are resting." Still, as I was the only visitor he had, I said that I would depart a little from the usual practice during my retreat, as the circumstances fully justified, and would come to see him every day: it was no long journey, his room was close to mine, and there would be no great distraction in it. "No, no; I should not like it," he answered; "I have no need of any one. I never feel lonely while I am with God, and I am never more with God than when I am not among men."

I complied with his wish, and saw him once only during my retreat; but my thoughts were often with him, and every day I left at his door a little note addressed to him. He afterwards thanked me warmly for the attention. He never was left alone more than suited him, and he was not fatigued by meditation. Thus, on my asking him whether he grew weary of his long sleepless nights, he answered, "I am never weary of them; the time does not even seem to me long. I pray, I think of the goodness of our Lord, of the happiness of heaven, and this consoles me for my being sinful and sick on earth." Only, during the few first days, he was a little fatigued, to use his own expression, as he had been at Saint-Acheul, by the follies to which a poor invalid's head is given up, by the waking dreams and vagaries of the imagin-

ation, which reverted incessantly to the same chimera. But he prayed for deliverance from this trouble, and the empty dreams vanished never to return; his mind remained clear, and was no less calm than his heart.

It had been thought necessary to require him to allow the Brother Infirmarian not to be present in his room, but to be at hand; the attendant slept in the ante-chamber, and was ready to rise at the first sound of the bell. The patient at first showed some dislike to having anyone so near him; the smallest noise made his want of sleep more obstinate and irksome. But his charity soon caused his thoughts to turn in another direction. He often disturbed the poor Brother's sleep, and was glad when he heard him snore: "At any rate," he said, "the good Brother is getting some sleep, and is making up for the time he has lost through me."

Every day different pious persons sent him some of the rarities of the season from every quarter of Paris; he was filled with emotion at this.

"What kindness!" he often exclaimed; "it is admirable; these souls are filled with the charity of our Lord."

Meantime, though the ailment seemed to remain stationary, it was really advancing with only too great rapidity. The symptoms did not grow in severity, but his strength diminished, and there began to be talk of hectic fever, of internal disease attacking the principle of life itself, rather than any particular organ.

In the first week of February I received a letter which gave me much matter for thought. The same person who in 1852 believed that Heaven had granted F. de Ravignan six years longer life, sent me this fatal report for the sickness of 1858:—

"Reverend Father, our prayers will not stay the hand of God; I am intimately convinced of it. On Sunday, our Lord told me that His justice

itself would not allow Him to hear us : the Father had earned the recompense which was awaiting him. . . . More than a month ago I saw the place in heaven destined for the Reverend Father, and since that time I have been wholly unable to ask our Lord to leave him any longer on this earth." The first prediction had been realised ; the second might prove no less well-founded.

It was resolved to hold a consultation, to which the first physicians of Paris should be summoned. The patient was averse to this step, but in compliance with the wishes of his family, he yielded to it with a perfect good grace. "Very well," he said ; "you will have done all that could be done." It took place on the 5th of February ; on that day he began to speak to me clearly about his approaching end, and I myself commenced the practice of noting down his more remarkable expressions. Immediately on leaving his room I went into my own, and wrote them word for word as if from his dictation.

First, he recommended me to tell him quite openly the result of the consultation which was about to take place : "Do not be afraid of telling me the truth," he said ; "for my own part I fear nothing. I certainly might have had reason to dread God's justice on account of my numberless sins ; but our Lord is so good ! And then, is it not the best thing ?" I promised that I would tell him the whole truth, and was opening the door to leave the room when he called me back and said, "By the way, Father, there is something I want to say to you : I bequeath you my relic of St Francis Xavier." And he told me where it was preserved.

On my communicating to him shortly after what had been the result of the consultation, he only answered : "It is just as it should be. So this time the disease is grave and serious. I am very glad."

On the same day, M. Cruveilhier said to him, "You are getting worse." "So much the better, so much the better," was his prompt reply. The physician went on, "I had still entertained hopes that you would assist me at my death." "No my dear Doctor," answered the patient, "it will just be the contrary."

I had been reading to him a very affectionate letter, in which one of his nephews, M. Maurice Exelmans, pressed him to come once more to look for health in the South. "It is very kind," he remarked, with a smile; "but to go to the South! I have a very different journey to make. A much better journey. I had prayed that I might die on the 19th of March; but I fancy I was over-eager. I must remain master of myself and keep down my desires."

At the first news of danger, the Baron de Ravignan hastened from Bordeaux: it was the third time of his coming to Paris since his brother's illness. I told F. de Ravignan. "I must keep a guard over myself," he said, "not to be overcome; I do not want nature to prevail with me in this my last sickness. But I hope that my good and pious brother will raise himself by faith above nature. God has willed it, and all is well."

He would say from time to time: "Poor people of the world! What compassion we ought to have for souls! What a great grace religious vocation is!"

One day he said to me: "How fortunate I am to die in the Society, in my dear Society of Jesus! What a grace and happiness! and yet, how unworthy I was of it!" He uttered these words with real transport, literally trembling with joy. I asked him to gain me the same grace. "Yes, yes, you shall live and die in the Society." After a short pause he added:—"I will ask F. Provincial's permission to leave you all my papers; you may do

what you like with them ; my own opinion would be that they are fit only for the fire."

Another time he said to me : " Pray God to give me humility and patience. I am afraid that I am full of indifference and presumption : am I not under an illusion ? What is your opinion ? do you think I can let things take their course without apprehension ? " " Consider, my dear Father," I answered, " your disposition has all the marks laid down in the Exercises as denoting the Good Spirit. Do you not remember that our Blessed Father would have us be indifferent to all things—to death no less than to life—in order that we may be ready for all ? And then the confidence you feel does not rest on your own merits, but on the goodness of our Lord." " You are quite right," he replied, calmly.

Another time I heard these words from him, uttered with an expression of pious, loving complaint : " Really I have very little suffering. God is sparing my weakness. And then the deep peace I enjoy is a favour I have no way earned. No doubt I owe it to the prayers which people have been good enough to offer for me. God grants them in His own manner, and gives me something better than health." There was truly no want of prayers for him ; for two months together, vows and novenas were made on all sides for his recovery ; communions and pilgrimages offered ; and holy relics, famous for the miracles wrought by their use, were sent to him from every direction—even from foreign countries—Italy, Germany, and England. He received these proofs of interest with gratitude and humility—like a man who had great need of help ; and he himself joined in the novenas which were continually renewed for his restoration ; but he did so with a firm conviction that Heaven would grant to his soul the favour asked on behalf

of his body. "I feel certain," he said, "that God will not work a miracle for my cure. I do not deserve it, and, after all, I do not wish it."

He spoke with the utmost contempt of his own body, which was wasting away under his eyes: "It is a bag of filth," he said; and he went on in a strain of sneering at himself. "Really, I should be glad to die on a dung-hill; it would be a very good end, and such as I deserve." On some one expressing compassion for his sufferings, "What does it matter?" he answered; "it passes away like everything else; time keeps on its course, and we make our profit from it."

I told him the particulars of a great scandal, which a certain Bishop had mentioned to me: "How truly," he exclaimed, in a tone of the deepest sorrow, "how truly is the holy Church the Spouse of Jesus crucified!"

I asked whether St Ignatius was still, as formerly, always present to his soul; he answered, "The thought of my Father, St Ignatius, never leaves me night or day." Shortly afterwards he gave me a new proof of it. On the 10th of February I went, as usual, to visit him early in the morning, when he said, "I received a great grace last night! I asked my Blessed Father definitively whether this sickness would lead to my death. He gave me an answer in the depth of my heart, with a clearness and distinctness which fill me at this moment with most absolute certainty, accompanied with the greatest joy and peace. I did not ask anything more; it would have been mere curiosity. Besides, I care very little about everything else; it belongs to God alone to settle these matters. So I am without any kind of presage as to the day and hour. I certainly should be glad if it was the Feast of St Joseph, the 19th of March, or that of the Annunciation, on the 25th: indeed, I have

prayed that it might be so. However, it is very little matter, thanks be to God. All that I know is, that I am going to die; and the sooner the better." "In what you have said," I answered, "I recognise all the signs of the Good Spirit." "Yes," he replied; "it is true. Come, we must have decision and vigour in this business as in everything else. As to the last Sacraments," he went on, "my impression is, that we can wait some time yet. I know quite well that, especially among ourselves, we do not wait to the last moment. But I still retain all my faculties unimpaired and as clear as ever. If there were the least weakness, probably I should be the first to notice it; but if you yourself observe any weakening, you must not delay: of course it will be whenever you like."

At F. de Ravignan's request I wrote to the holy person who had prayed and suffered so much for him fourteen years before, and who had often subsequently obtained graces for him from Heaven; he asked her to obtain him the favour of dying on the 19th or the 25th of March. It was not long before her answer came: "The sacrifice will soon be consummated! I have not ceased to pray that it may be deferred until one of the days the Father wishes; but I persevere more out of compliance with his last wish than from any conviction that my prayer will be granted. As often as I pray for this, an interior voice answers that he will celebrate these feasts in heaven. Besides this, it seems to me that to keep him on earth is to delay his felicity.

"If he can still hear my name mentioned, let it be to give him another assurance of the deep gratitude and respectful attachment of his child, to whom he has not, as he thinks, caused suffering, but whom he has caused to live the true life. I trust that he will pray for me."

I knew enough how well tempered was the soul

of F. de Ravignan, how great was his humility and strength, to venture on communicating this answer to him. On hearing that he was soon to enter heaven, he seemed almost troubled through astonishment and joy. He appeared to shrink, clasped his hands, and exclaimed with a broken voice, and hardly restraining tears : " O God, how undeserved ! A sinner like me ! But I deserve nothing but chastisement. I ought to endure suffering ! I have done no good ; and then my faults, my sins, my pride ! That poor child has been made the victim instead of me ; she has suffered and expiated and merited for me."

" My dear Father," I said, " when God calls you, do not forget to ask on my behalf for the only two graces which I desire in this world—love for the Exercises of St Ignatius, and perseverance in my vocation." He answered with the warmest expression of charity, " You shall—you shall have those graces ! Yes, yes ; love for the holy Exercises ; it is everything for us. But, Father, also the observance of the Rules. I am deeply convinced that in these latter times, attention to that point is the first duty of Superiors, because it is the first necessity of subjects."

He went on, " I have obtained F. Provincial's permission to leave you all my papers. Thank God I have nothing in this world besides them. I only ask that people will pardon and pray for me."

Circumstances were noticed throughout this three months' illness which to the last illustrated the sick man's character, and showed the clearness of his mind and the strength of his will : he continued to be thoroughly himself, even when a mere wreck remained of what he had been ; he never for a moment relaxed in his habit of exquisite cleanliness, religious respect, and graceful politeness. He

made a point of washing thoroughly every morning up to the very last, however great might be the weakness, fever, and difficulty of breathing from which he was suffering. Whenever any little service was rendered him, he invariably used his habitual expression, "Thank you; I beg pardon for troubling you." At the close of each visit from the physician, he held out his hand to him, saying, "How very kind you are!"

F. Fessard, the Provincial, arrived in Paris about this time, and paid frequent visits to the sufferer. F. de Ravignan rose up to salute him as often as he came into the room; and on his leaving, bowed low, and begged his blessing.

On one occasion the Provincial deemed it his duty to ask him to comply with his wish in a matter which he knew would be irksome. "It is not as your Brother in religion that I request this of you," he said, with a smile, "but as your Superior." The sick man at once answered cheerfully, "Whatever you please, Father—whatever you please." Another time the Superior requested him to grant a short interview to a person of consideration. F. de Ravignan at first gave a gesture of refusal, but on F. Fessard's adding, "It seems to me that charity requires it," the expression of his countenance underwent an immediate change; he received the stranger with admirable grace, so that the visitor exclaimed on leaving the room, "What a wonderful man! By his calmness in the embrace of death he still continues to preach!"

Until the 10th of February F. de Ravignan left his bed every day, and spent five or six hours sitting near the fire, so tranquil and industrious during these last leisure periods of his life, that his mind seemed unaffected by the weakening of his body. After tying up papers, and burning letters, he looked through some books, and last of all the just

published work of the Count Franz de Champagny, on Rome and Judea, the sequel to his "History of the Cæsars." He had a high esteem for the author, and not less for his work. The volume, the pages of which had been turned over by the dying man, reverted before long to the person by whom it had been given, and was received by him as a holy relic.

Weak as his illness made him, he resolved to send a few lines in answer to the Countess de Gontaut, whose brother, the pious Cardinal de Rohan, Archbishop of Besançon, then lately dead, had been a devoted friend of the Society. He accordingly took his pen, and on Saturday, the 30th of January, he wrote to her the following little note, which will remain to commemorate a holy friendship :—

"I salute, and with all my heart bless, my dear daughter in Jesus Christ. I never lose her holy memory.

"My tender gratitude unites in prayer with your soul. I am going slowly to the end."

On the 7th of February he was still able to write to the Princess Mary of Baden, Duchess of Hamilton : "I will at least write you two lines. I cannot do even this without effort.

"My sickness does not diminish. I am going where God leads me. My soul is earnest in prayer for your soul, and for all that you hold dear.

"I am very grateful for your kind interest ; I am deeply impressed by all your kindness."

One day he resolved to try to walk a little in his room. With one hand on a stick, and the other resting on my arm, he succeeded in making a few steps, the last he was to take in this world. He could no longer hold up his head ; it fell forward on his breast, and he lost all control over its motions.

He was soon tired with the effort, and lay down ; he then seemed happy, and said, "This is the position I must finally take up ; I will not leave my bed again."

On Saturday, the 13th of February, he sat up, and wrote the following little note to the Superioress of the Noviciate at Conflans ; his hand was firm at first, but soon became unsteady :—

"I take advantage of a moment when I can still gather enough strength to write you a few words ; I shall soon be unable to do so. I am happy in my remembrances of your dear family at Conflans and of its Mother.

"Live, my dear Sisters, in the spirit of faith.

"War against the impulses of nature.

"Be very courageous in trusting the boundless, yes, boundless, mercy of our Lord.

"Since I became perfectly assured of my approaching end, I have been calm and joyous ; I trust that it will not be long in coming.

"In heaven, when God shall call me thither, I will not forget you.

"I am consumed with fever.

"Farewell, farewell ! I bless you for eternity.

"Pray for me."

This sickness of one private person seemed to be a public misfortune. It was talked of in the Court, in social circles, even in schools ; tears were shed in pious families, prayers were offered in cloisters. Really it is hard to conceive that any man could have received on his deathbed proofs of a more universal interest.

Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress condescended to despatch a messenger every day to receive an account of the state of the sick man's health, which was written and signed by the Superior. His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop

of Paris was good enough to pay several visits to the revered religious. His Excellency the Nuncio Apostolic also came to give his blessing to the soldier of the Church, who was dying of exhaustion after five and thirty years of toil and struggle. Every day from morning till night there was a crowd at the door anxious to hear the news ; letters were constantly arriving, some addressed to the Superior, some to the object of all this interest, signed with some of the most illustrious names of our time, and full of the most touching recommendations.

One contained an out-pouring of sorrow : " My tears have never ceased to flow since I heard that there was no longer any hope. I have not strength to resign myself to what must come ; my heart is broken, it seems that there is gloom all around me, and I feel that all my courage will depart with him who was the support of my faith, my hope in this life of misery."

Another expressed lively gratitude : " You are desirous of leaving us ; it is to go to heaven. How can we venture to lament you ? My dear Father, may a blessing be on you for all the good you have done me ! Obtain my pardon for having profited by it so little, and pray that you may be near me when I draw my own last breath. My dear good excellent Father, we shall meet again. May you summon me to be near you ; we will pass our eternity together."

Many made him some parting promise : " Bless us, dear Father, as you go to heaven, as our Lord blessed His disciples. We shall perhaps remain long looking at the place where you disappear from our eyes ; but we promise you that we will go down again into the arena, and follow in your footsteps, that we may soon be again united with you in our eternal country."

Some mothers of families wrote, "Dear Father, give your blessing to all my relations, children, and friends; give a blessing to me myself. Beg God to give us whatever you may think it good for us to have." Superioresses of religious houses bade farewell in the name of their communities: "You are leaving us for heaven! Carry to the foot of God's throne the expression of our gratitude for all the good which He has been pleased to work by your instrumentality in this dear family. When you are raised to heaven, do not cease to extend to us the fatherly protection which we have always loved and valued so highly." Some requested that at least their names might be recalled to his memory; others asked for some message, but a single word, from his lips. Cherished intentions were perpetually being recommended to his prayers, pious objects presented to him to bless.

The sick man listened to all, and answered all with the utmost simplicity. After his agony had begun, he was still able first to bless, and then to kiss a Crucifix which I offered him; and he asked me, "For whom?" "For the Duchess of Dalmatia," I answered. Shortly after, I received the following expression of gratitude from the same hand as had entrusted me with the commission: "I shall not attempt to express to you how much I was moved at the sight of this Crucifix, hallowed by the blessing of our revered Father in his agony. I thank God for having inspired me with the thought of offering this image of our Saviour to the holy man at the moment when he was about to obtain the reward of his sacrifices and his virtues. I intend to place the Crucifix he blessed in a reliquary, together with the letter you wrote, to prove the authenticity of this parting benediction. I will one day transmit this Crucifix and this letter to my eldest daughter, and they will be a shield to

my children in life, and a protection at the hour of death."

Communications were continually passing meantime between the dying man in the Rue de Sèvres and a pious invalid in the Rue Saint-Honoré. While the religious was wasting away little by little, the Marchioness de —— seemed to be expiring in torture: like him, to use her own expression, she was satiated with the Cross. Twice every day the physician, M. Cruveilhier, passed and repassed with news and messages. These two souls were united in the trial of their sufferings, and were not long in receiving a common consolation. The Countess de ——, a friend of the sick lady, and a Protestant by birth, had been prepared for the faith by the care of F. de Ravignan; but God deferred her perfect conversion to the last moments of the life of the apostle. At this time she wrote to me: "Tell F. de Ravignan that God made use of his services to touch my heart, and that I lay at his feet my soul, and whatever good the holy Catholic Church shall work in my heart. Beg him to offer a last prayer for me." After a few days, the Countess de —— made her abjuration in the presence of her pious friend.

The dying man's family was represented at his side by the Baron de Ravignan and his eldest son, an Auditor of the Council of State, who was called Gustave, after his uncle, and was beloved by him as a son. His sisters, who were living at a distance in the South of France, wrote letters full of the tenderest sorrow and affection. They never ceased to be in spirit and heart in his room, kneeling at the foot of his bed, imploring the blessing of their holy brother for themselves and their children. As they were destined never to see him again, they begged a memorial of him, some locks of his hair, which they desired to preserve as a precious relic.

During these closing days, a very few friends were allowed to make their way once more into the room where they had often received so much consolation. It was my office to introduce them, and I have seen these visitors fall down on both knees before the sick man, covering his hand with kisses and tears; while he, softened, but full of calm, of simplicity, and of dignity, in death no less than in life, gave them advice, made them promise to follow it, and though gasping for breath, preached as effectually as in the pulpit of Nôtre-Dame. The Bishop of Orleans, in the funeral address, pictured him as he had seen him: "I saw him once again not many days since; he was already in the embrace of death, and rays of glory seemed to be glowing on that pale forehead: immortal brightness gleamed in the depth of those eyes, so soon to be closed. I saw behind him the splendours of the glory of heaven."

The prelate, in the same discourse, mentioned another interview not less affecting: there was no need to mention any name, to show whom he meant, when he alluded to "one of the best and oldest friends" of the departed preacher, "himself a great, a matchless orator." Then he suddenly exclaimed, "He will allow me to say it to him in this place, his holy friend does at this moment answer for his soul before God's throne, more than he answered for it on earth." F. de Ravignan had, in truth, pledged himself for the salvation of this life-long friend, and in the warmth of zeal had said, "I answer for you, soul for soul." On the 29th of March 1857, a few months only before he was attacked by his last sickness, he received the following letter, which pious gratitude allows me to reproduce in this place:—

"MY KIND FRIEND AND REVERED FATHER,—

Thanks be to God, I feel that, by your aid, I have resolved heartily to follow the path you point out. I will not fail to come and seek humiliation and strength in your presence and from your ministry. *Auditui meo dabis gaudium et lætitiā, et exultabunt ossa humiliata*—‘To my hearing Thou shalt give joy and gladness, and the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice.’

“My reason and conscience are satisfied. I thank God, and bless you, from the bottom of my heart. Continue, I beg, to give me, my good Father, the protection of your tender affection; come to my aid; I have need of your counsel and encouragement.

“I embrace you affectionately, and look for a life of calm and rest in the way of salvation only from you. “BERRYER.”

F. de Ravignan answered: “My very dear friend, your joy is my joy, for my heart is your heart. Let us render thanks to God.

“Come to me, I beg you.

“I embrace you as a tenderly-loved brother.”

M. Berryer came again to visit the death-bed of the Apostle, and, throwing himself on his knees, listened with tears to the farewell with which exhortation was mingled. I should never be able to describe all the eloquence and grandeur that was found in this scene of which I was for one instant a witness.

About the same time there came to the Rue de Sèvres a young foreigner of noble birth, and Secretary to one of the principal Embassies in Paris; he had, not long before, abjured the Protestant religion in the presence of F. de Ravignan. It was thought prudent at first to keep his conversion a secret from his family, but it came to the knowledge of his father, who threatened to disinherit him: his severe trials had been succeeded by

consolation ; one of his cousins had followed his example ; his parents had given up their resistance, and he was about to leave Paris with the double assurance of an advance in his profession and of a matrimonial alliance which he had long desired. He determined once more before leaving to visit the priest whose ministry had been rendered by God so beneficial to him ; but, as he could not be admitted to the sick-room, he wrote these farewell lines in my own apartment, and I saw his tears fall and cover the paper :—

“ F. Superior has told me, my dear Father, that you can receive letters. I scarcely venture to tell you how earnestly I every day pray to God for your recovery ; for when the end comes you will be happy in heaven, and it would be selfish and blameworthy to wish for your stay amidst the miseries we suffer. To myself, your departure from this earth will be a loss which can never be repaired. If I cannot be allowed to see you, allow me at least to thank you once more, and finally. You have done everything for me ; I owe to you all I have ; my gratitude shall never diminish. Do not forget me in heaven, dear Father ; pray for me and help me as before, when far removed no less than when at hand. I shall find support in this thought.”

It was a very fitting case to make an exception : before long I wrote to the young diplomatist that the dying man wished to see him, to give him his blessing and a last embrace. He was given his choice of two different days for this parting interview. “ I hasten,” he wrote in answer, “ to thank you for the good news you have conveyed. It will be a great comfort to me to receive once more the blessing of the beloved and venerated guide of my soul. On the other hand, the meeting you have had the goodness to procure me will mark the

epoch of my being separated for ever in this world from him to whom at present I am more attached than to any other person. You will understand my motives in putting off this painful moment as far as possible ; and on this account I select the later of the two days which you place at my disposal."

Nothing but tears and blessings found place in this audience given by a dying man. F. de Ravignan was deeply moved by the exhibition of so much gratitude and sorrow, and seemed to forget himself and abandon his ordinary behaviour ; he asked for a copy of the portrait of himself, consenting for the first and last time to look at it ; then he wrote in pencil a few words which came from his heart, and at the moment of parting handed the engraving to his young friend as a pledge of a remembrance which should endure for ever.

The members of the Society at Rome, as well as in Paris, were full of emotion, and were constant in prayer. As soon as the news of his danger reached the Gesù, F. Rubillon, the Assistant for France, wrote to one of our Fathers in Paris, who had sent him word as to the state of the invalid : " You will have no difficulty in imagining the impression made on F. General and all of us by your last letter. I can well understand the desire felt by our good and revered Father to die and to leave this world where his toils and sufferings have been so great : but he ought, on the other hand, to understand the regret with which his Brethren are inspired out of the charity which binds us together, and also out of love for the Society, which is threatened with the loss, on this earth, of one of its most useful members. Tell our good F. de Ravignan that F. General sends him a blessing which proceeds from all the fulness of his heart, and that all our Fathers in Rome are praying for him, and desire to be borne in his remembrance."

F. General was not long in writing himself: "I have heard from F. Assistant the news you sent him as to the state of our good F. de Ravignan. I was much affected; I had been under the impression that the invalid we so much love was gradually recovering, and that all danger was over; and your letter came to fill us with fear that we shall not have him long among us on earth. I am much grieved to hear this *secundum hominem*, but the will of God before all. I am consoled and filled with joy at the dispositions of the sick man's soul. I offered Mass for him this morning, and will make a daily recommendation of him to God: *Si possibile est, transeat calix iste; verumtamen non Mea voluntas sed tua fiat*—'If it be possible let this chalice pass away; nevertheless not My will but Thine be done.' Tell the dear invalid that I send him my blessing. If God calls him, we trust he will remember us, and, above all, gain us the grace of being faithful to our Rules and Constitutions: *Nulla nos nocebit adversitas si nulla nobis dominetur iniquitas.*"

On the 14th of February the sick man had me summoned at an early hour, and said:—"I have had a more troubled night than ever. In connection with this, a thought has occurred to me of which I must tell you; but do not give me an answer on the spot; I submit it to you—you must examine and pray over it before answering.

"I have been asking myself whether to try to get some little relief during the night would be thwarting the designs of our Saviour, Who demands this just expiation of my sins. Ought I not rather to endure suffering in solitude, and without consolation? Still I must follow the Rule, and consult you, and it will be your province to decide.

"Well, I should find it some relief if, for the

future, some one could be with me during the night, or at least every other night. Every hour they could read to me for ten minutes some verses from the Imitation, or perhaps some passages from lives of Saints."

I was about to answer, but he went on: "Do not give me an answer; think it over in God's presence; for if I feel that our Lord reproaches me for seeking this solace, I shall at once refuse it."

I complied with his pious desire, and went to consult our Lord in the chapel: "Well," I said, on my return, "the question is resolved. You have done your duty in asking for what might give you relief; we will do ours in procuring it for you. So for the future there will be two of our Fathers and Brothers appointed to be with you every night; one up to twelve o'clock, the other until morning. Besides, they are all so desirous of seeing you. They have been deprived of this pleasure ever since your illness began, but they will be gratified at its end." And in reality, as soon as it became known in the community, a degree of readiness was exhibited which may easily be conceived: every one begged as a favour to be allowed a turn. The sick man was much affected at this alacrity, and from time to time said, "How kind our Fathers are! I am so grateful for their charity."

F. de Ravignan's love of exactitude and precision was maintained to the last, and he determined to draw up a little programme of what was to be done during the hours of the night: I wrote it word for word from his dictation.

First the life of F. de Beauvau was to be read, then that of Cardinal Bellarmine, both, like himself, Jesuits. When the reading ceased, he frequently remarked: "What are we compared with these great men!"

He also said to me on the same day, the 14th of

February : " It seems to me that the time has come for the Last Sacraments. But it is an important work, and we must take our time over it, and perform it with all possible seriousness. I shall set aside the whole of to-day to prepare. I will not communicate at Mass to-morrow, so that I may receive Extreme Unction and the Viaticum in the course of the day.

" All the community can attend, according to our custom. After this I shall be able to receive the Viaticum from time to time.

" I have been asking myself whether I ought to make a general Confession, but I confess I feel no inclination for it. I will confine myself to one accusation. Besides, you know all the rest : I have told you all. As to sorrow for my faults, I can safely say I do feel some. Yes, I really am confounded and humbled at the thought that God has given me pardon ; I do not understand how it is ; still less that He has washed me from my iniquities in virtue of the expiation of others. It is a mystery to me.

" My dear Father, I do desire to die, perhaps too warmly. But God is my witness that my object is not to escape further suffering on earth, but only to enjoy the sight of Him in heaven."

At about half-past five that evening he made his Confession to me ; what humility, contrition, confidence he manifested ! At half-past seven he was anxious to confess again, that a fresh absolution might increase still further the grace in his soul.

After this I begged his pardon for my having always been ungrateful to him and never doing him any good : " Do not say so, do not say so ! " he exclaimed : " it annoys me, it gives me serious annoyance. It is I who have been unworthy."

On the morning of the 15th he said to me : " I am very calm and very happy." At eight o'clock the bell was rung to summon the community to the

chapel to accompany the Blessed Sacrament to the sick room. Before the ceremony of the Extreme Unction, F. de Ravignan made me a sign to come near him, and requested me to ask pardon in his name of all who were kneeling around. I complied with his pious wish, and seeing how deeply the community were affected, I gave expression to their feelings, and said: "I am sure our Fathers and Brothers will give you pardon with all their hearts if they find anything to pardon. But I can vouch for it, that they find nothing.

"Come, my dear Father, consider this as the last time our Lord comes to you. He comes as He promised; and this time He comes in order to take you with Him: *Iterum venio et accipiam vos ad Me ipsum*—'I will come again and take you to Myself.' You may well say to Him, with the disciples: 'Stay with us, Lord, for the evening is come and the day is far spent.' Or, rather, the dawn is appearing, and it will be for you to stay with Him.

"In the name of the holy Church and of the Society, our second Mother, we bring you these last Sacraments which the Institute so well calls the spiritual armour which the bounty of God has prepared for our passage from time to eternity.

"Have courage and confidence. Call to mind, at this moment, the grand words of exhortation of our Father, St Ignatius, addressed to his sons in sickness and in death: 'In our death, even more than in our life, let God, our Creator and Lord, be glorified by our submission to His good pleasure, and our neighbour edified by an example of patience and courage, accompanied by lively faith, hope, and love of the eternal goods which our Lord has merited and gained for us by the unparalleled labours of His Life and Death.'

"My dear Father, the Society of Jesus in heaven

is your protection : you see around you the sorrow and the prayers of the Society of Jesus on earth, which will not cease until our Lord is pleased to set your soul free from your body, and to receive it to Himself."

On the 18th of February I said to him : " My dear Father, you are sinking." " Oh yes, I am sure of it," he answered with a thrill of joy : " to die ! what a joy and happiness !"

On that day, I was to attend the ordinary meeting of the Children of Mary, where he had so often presided ; he said to me, in a tone of compassion : " It is always I that lay burdens on you : do not tire yourself." I asked him to suggest a subject for my exhortation, and he said : " Speak to them on the spirit of penance. Yes, tell them to despise the vanity of the world and to think of eternity."

On the 19th, M. Cruveilhier said to his patient that all hope of a cure was not yet gone ; that, if only time could be gained, nature would exert herself, and in the end gain the upper hand ; he answered, " Oh, I hope not. It is not only one organ that is attacked, but the very principle of life." He afterwards said to me : " What the physician said gave me a moment's trouble, but it was merely superficial ; for as soon as I recollected myself, I again heard the voice of my blessed Father in the bottom of my heart, the answer of death joined with the happiness of heaven. St Ignatius would not have me entertain doubt, and reproaches me for giving way to it."

His suffering was very great during the night between the 19th and 20th ; in the morning he said to me, " Blessed be God for it : I was afraid I should have no suffering." Then, to make sure against illusion, he consulted me on his interior state, and went on : " Except occasional positive acts of contrition, there is a state of habitual union

with God, and an almost sensible presence of St Ignatius. Whenever I call him and say, Father, Father, he is there. Add to this a permanent desire of death, in order to see our Lord God, not for my own sake, but purely for His glory. I cannot say that I am indifferent to life and death, (that would be above my strength :) but I feel resigned to a prolongation of life, if it be God's will. I confess, however, that this last remark is theoretical more than practical. I fancy that I see in all this the signs of the Good Spirit, according to the teaching of the Exercises. I feel, too, that it is God, God alone, that works everything in me : I myself do nothing ; I am merely passive. I owe everything to the prayers offered on my behalf. I cannot understand anything, anything whatever, of God's goodness : it is an abyss !”

On the morning of the 21st of February he said to me, after the most critical and painful night of all he had passed through : “ My dear Father, this has been a night of expiation. I recognise the design of God, Who is at length satisfying a craving I have felt to suffer in punishment of my sins. For an hour and a half I felt in its fullest intensity the agony which precedes death. I was on the point of having you summoned, for I thought I should not survive the night. This was even something like delirium, that is to say, in the lower part of the soul ; but the higher part remained calm, in submission to God and union with Him. It is well, all things are well !”

This was the beginning of a complication in his disease ; the crisis was the commencement and earliest symptom of an inflammation of the bowels. Pain took the place of his former state of languor ; he suffered acutely and without intermission. From this day forward the stomach refused all nourishment, he became exceedingly weak and

unable to turn in his bed ; the expression of his countenance had hitherto remained natural, but a look of death now became more and more discernible.

This change in his condition caused some excitement : the sufferer himself retained his habitual tranquillity, and only said to me, " It is a proof of a weak mind to be so easily disturbed."

Shortly afterwards, he said : " We will make the great Novena to St Francis Xavier in the beginning of March, from the 3d to the 12th ; and as it was just on the feast of St Francis Xavier that I fell ill, we will make the Novena in thanksgiving." At this time, as we see, he must have thought that he would last to the day he mentioned. But on the 24th he said : " At last I am getting near the end : the day will come sooner than I had any hope. Just now I am a little cold and indifferent, but in reality I am not without confidence and peace.

" After all the ill I have done in my life, how can I venture to have hope ? But God's mercy has no bounds. It would be right if I were placed beneath the lowest of the reprobate, and nevertheless I am allowed to hope for heaven, and I shall die in the Society ! what a great grace ! what an immense happiness ! My dear Father, pray to our Lord to grant me pardon."

A few moments after, he added : " There is nothing in this world of which I regret the loss ; I have done no good in it, and nothing but evil."

In the course of the night, between the 23d and the 24th, F. Provincial, who remained with him, asked whether he would like to hear some Psalm read from the Breviary, or whether he would not prefer to remain in silence in union with God ; he answered, " Yes, yes, silence ;" and F. Provincial went on, " Join in spirit with the Agony of our

Lord, for, my dear Father, you are in an agony." "Yes," he replied, "it is true I am in agony, but I am in peace."

Early in the morning of the 25th of February, he said to me : "I begin to feel that my head is failing : so we must make haste to take advantage of the permission given by the Archbishop to anticipate the time of the Jubilee. I have been thinking of gaining it on next Wednesday, the 3d of March ; I will pass the two previous days in retreat, and see no one but my brother, yourself, and the Infirmarian. Assign me conditions for gaining the Jubilee ; such as I can fulfil. You know how much I like to have everything precise ; so state the conditions very clearly."

I soon came back with the conditions written out, and I read them over to the dying man. Instead of making the stations, he was to kiss the Crucifix ; instead of giving alms, he was to elicit an act of charity ; and in place of fasting, to offer to God the sacrifice of his life.

"Very good, very good," he answered ; then, raising his eyes to heaven, he went on, "March has come at last : I shall soon have finished my work."

Though this was the closing day of his life, the earlier part differed in nothing from the few preceding days. The physician observed nothing at either visit, in the morning or in the evening, but an increase of weakness, and the continuance of the previous symptoms. He only foresaw that the smallest change might speedily bring on the end. It was not long before I noticed a bad sign : his eyes seemed to gain in brightness ; they had an unnatural gleam, and his face became flushed ; besides this, there was a sort of restlessness in the hands, which were in constant motion, raising the sheet and laying it again on his breast : and he

often mechanically wound the bell-rope round and round his fingers.

The hours of this day passed in his usual practices of piety. From time to time I read him some verses from the Imitation, wherever the book happened to open, and Providence led us to light constantly on most apposite sentences. In the course of the afternoon I said my office at his bedside, and I read aloud some passages, in which he joined mentally.

At six o'clock in the evening I went to my own room, yielding my place to the Brother Infirmarian, who came every day at this time to read some pious book. Within a few minutes he hastened to me and announced that a change was taking place. On reaching the room I found F. de Ravignan gasping and almost fainting with pain. "Are you in great suffering?" I asked, "Yes," he replied. I proposed to give him absolution, and he answered, "With all my heart," and he recited aloud the words of his act of contrition. I spoke to him of the Jubilee, but he said, "Not yet; we shall have time afterwards."

During this critical half-hour, no complaint nor even sigh escaped him. He occasionally inhaled some ether; frequently he kissed the Crucifix. The pain gradually subsided, and life was restored for a moment.

On the bell ringing for collation, he himself asked for a little weak wine and water. At his earnest request I left him in order to join the community, the Brother Infirmarian remaining close to his bed. I returned in company with F. Provincial, and we began one of those pious conversations which he had been so fond of listening to. But circumstances were changed! before long, he said, "I am tired," and F. Provincial left the room, while I remained alone in silence.

I soon noticed the signs which are the immediate precursors of death ; the restlessness of the hands was on the increase, his breathing was weak, short, and hurried ; the patient was continually wiping away the sweat that ran down his face. He was in his last agony.

At nine o'clock the bell gave the signal for retiring to rest, and he made me a sign to go : I kept my place ; but, as I had been up with him the previous night, he would not allow me to remain. " No," he said, " it gives me pain." I gave orders that I was to be summoned in time.

Nothing requiring notice happened during the earlier part of the night : some particulars of the death of Bellarmine were read to him every half-hour : at midnight, he twice thanked the person who had been sitting with him, told him to go and get some rest, and gave his blessing with a smile.

The Brother Infirmarian came next to be with him. He still frequently asked for drink, for the fever consumed him ; but his pain was constantly on the increase, and he sought relief by changes of position, and by dipping his hands in two basins of cold water. " Nothing gives me any ease," he said, at length : " I must have patience." The Brother proposed to call me : " No, no, leave him quiet," was the answer. However, he did come to summon me, as I had expressly ordered ; it was at one o'clock in the morning. I found F. de Ravignan struggling with death : his chest was distended, and respiration was weak, but loud and difficult ; he was bathed in perspiration, and his hands were as cold as ice.

I threw myself on my knees by his bed-side : " Do you know me, my dear Father ?" " How could I fail to know you ?" " So you are at the point of death ?" " But I have not yet had enough

pain." "You are mistaken, it is the end." "Well, so much the better; I am very glad of it." "Do you wish to gain the Jubilee before you die?" "Certainly." "Then kiss the Crucifix." I presented to him the Crucifix, which had been hallowed by the last sighs of F. Godinot and F. Roothaan, and which he had brought back with him from Rome in 1853: and, while he was pressing it with his lips, I said: "Make an act of charity, offer to God the sacrifice of your life." "Most heartily." "Now, ask God's pardon for all the faults of your whole life." "Most heartily." "Now, ask God's pardon for all the faults of your whole life." He clasped his hands, raised his eyes to heaven, and said, with a loud voice: "Oh God, pardon all my sins. Father, pray to God to pardon me." While he was saying this he received the last absolution, and gained the great indulgence.

Afterwards he said to me: "Ask F. Provincial's pardon in my name." He reproached himself for the words he had used the day before about being tired. "My dear Father," I said, "do not forget what you have to do for us in heaven." "No, no." The Brother Infirmarian asked him, "Pray for me too." "My dear, good Brother! he has been so kind and attentive all through my illness. Yes, certainly, I will pray for you."

I went to fetch some holy water, and made a small sign of the Cross on his forehead: but, true to his old habits, he at once made one of his own great signs of the Cross, just as if in the pulpit of Notre-Dame.

I saw that he was on the point of leaving the world, and I sent to summon F. Provincial, who arrived almost immediately. He had scarcely opened the door, when the dying man said, "Reverend Father, I must ask you to pardon me." I attempted to dispel his uneasiness, but by an

expressive gesture he seemed to say, "Leave me alone, I know quite well what I am about."

F. Provincial put a question: "Would you like us to recite the prayers for those on the point of death?" "Yes, yes, do so." These were his last words; they show the Religious to have been obedient even to death.

It was clear that he was following us while we were reading these prayers.

When we had finished he had scarcely a spark of life left; I lifted up the Crucifix, and pronounced the Holy Name of Jesus; he opened his eyes, fixed his gaze on the image of his Saviour dying for his redemption, drew three long breaths, and bowed his head. A corpse only remained with us; the soul had departed to the bosom of God. It was half-past one in the morning of the 26th of February; the day was the second Friday in Lent, on which the Church recalls the memory of the Holy Lance which opened the side of our Saviour.

We see that F. de Ravignan's death was in accordance with his life. He kept his word, and despatched this last business in the same manner as he had performed every other. Undismayed to the last, he took his time in giving due attention to every point; and when his hour came, he expired in calm and happiness, giving his last look to the Cross, his last sign of life to the Name of Jesus, and his last sigh to the Sacred Heart.



CHAPTER XXX.

HIS FUNERAL.

The body is publicly exposed during three days—Extraordinary gathering of visitors—The simple but grand Procession—Funeral Service at Saint-Sulpice—Discourse by the Bishop of Orleans—The Cemetery of Mont-Parnasse.



DE RAVIGNAN was no more ; those of his brethren who had been with him accompanied his soul on its flight to God with their prayers, and begged for his admission to the peace which ends not, and the light which never fails. The hand of one of his brethren was laid on those eyes already dimmed in death, and closed them for ever. The body was clad in a soutane, and laid on an ordinary bed, the hands clasped on the breast, and holding the Crucifix and that rosary which had been so often pressed on that apostolic heart, and which was to rest there even in the grave. The community rose at four o'clock in the morning, and were told that death had visited the house ; and all the brethren of the departed Religious came, one after another, to sprinkle holy water on the corpse, and to pray for his eternal rest. In the course of the morning the Holy Sacrifice was offered for a last time at the little altar in the chamber of death.

A few friends were informed by letter before the public learned the news through the press, and they assembled round the corpse of the Apostle from a very early hour. Persons of the highest distinction were seen to cover with kisses and tears those hands now chilled in death, which had so often been raised to bless them from the pulpit, or in the tribunal of penance. The humility of the religious was no longer at hand to offer resistance, and nothing hindered the expression of veneration and sorrow.

In the course of that morning one of our fathers was preaching a Lent sermon in one of the parish churches of Paris, and he announced that F. de Ravignan was dead. So loud an outburst of sobs was caused by the news, that he himself was altogether overcome, and was forced to leave the pulpit without completing his discourse. The same evening he was addressing the congregation in another church, and made a simple allusion to the death of the Apostle, which by that time was generally known, and his first words again produced clear signs of deep emotion.

The newspapers which conveyed the mournful intelligence to every province of France were unanimous in passing the warmest encomiums on the virtue of the religious, who had commanded the respect of all parties. On Saturday the 27th, the following admirable and affecting lines from the pen of M. Louis Veuillot appeared in the *Univers*:—"The saintly life of F. de Ravignan has closed. Of men such as he we may truly say, in the beautiful phrase which Christianity teaches, that they go to a better life. He has entered into his reward; he enjoys the crown of the God whom he had loved and served. Joy is mingled with the grief which he has left behind in the hearts of all that knew him. God is the witness of the depth

of this grief. God knows how many Christians bewail him as their father. But he himself looked forward to death with hope, and it has come to satisfy his wishes. Happy are they whose hopes are fixed on death, and who, while compassed round with all the esteem which this world has to give, at peace with men, at peace with themselves, look to the supreme Master with the confidence of a workman who has performed his task, of a son who is returning to his Father's house.

"God alone knows the good done by a single man such as he; the blessings he has spread abroad, the works undertaken for God's glory which he has upheld, the miseries to which he has brought consolation. He is no more! It is no mere shadow that passes away; one man the less among the multitude that people the earth: it is a power which God withdraws, a light which becomes extinct; the number is diminished of those of whom it can be said, He is truly a man!

"How admirable has been his life! He acted wisely on that day when he rejected the advances made by the world, and bound himself to the Society of Jesus. He took poverty for his portion, and humility, and obedience, and toil; and better than all, he took persecution and reproach. But he found occasion for sacrifice, and with it he found strength, and glory too, although he valued it not nor sought it. This idol, worshipped by the world, was there; despite himself he found it awaiting him on the rough road of self-renouncement, on which he entered with so good a will. And how great was that glory! pure and bright, bringing no remorse or anxiety. It was far from calling on him to stoop to acquire it. On his very deathbed he found glory standing by his side, calm and mild, like a sister to his guardian virtues, poverty, obedience, chastity."

From the Friday morning onwards, so many persons had requested leave to come and look for a last time on the apostle of Notre-Dame and the father of their souls, that it was found necessary to devise some means of satisfying their piety. On the completion of the legal proof of the death, a little after mid-day, the body was brought down to a room on the ground-floor. A noble friend of the deceased insisted on sharing in the funereal work ; and while bending beneath the mattress on which the venerated corpse was laid, he said, amid frequent sobs, " So I have the privilege of supporting after death the priest who was my support through my whole life."

The room had been hung with plain white cloth ; the ornaments were six candles and a large crucifix ; the bier was a simple iron bedstead ; there was no other furniture. F. de Ravignan lay there in all his calm majestic beauty ; those well-known features, which had so often commanded admiration, still retained an undefinable impress of grandeur which they had received from death. It seemed that the departed soul had stamped all its holiness and nobility on the countenance, and there was a dignity which commanded respect, a calm which inspired all with more than hope. During the three days that the body was thus exposed, frequent attempts were made by artists to reproduce that heavenly expression. Never, they said, had so perfect a model been placed before them.

From Friday, the 26th of February, to the following Monday, the stream of visitors never ceased ; all classes joined in paying this parting mark of respect. Representatives were seen of every rank ; of the clergy, the religious orders, the army, and the magistracy ; of the nobility, the middle, and the lower classes. F. de Ravignan had been the Apostle of all.

It was necessary to take means to ensure active and regular movement in the incessant crowd. Visitors entered at one end of the room, and passed slowly along, with head bare and in the deepest silence, gathering into their inmost heart the great lessons afforded by the imposing scene and the humble furniture. Two of the brethren of the departed Jesuit were constantly occupied in applying to the body the rosaries, medals, Crucifixes, and even trinkets which pious hands presented for the purpose. Soldiers were seen to hallow by this touch the swords they used so well. Doubtless they hoped to gain from that great heart something of that heroic spirit of devotedness which had filled the soul of the priest, and which so well becomes the soul of a soldier.

It was strange: it might have been thought that the idea of sanctity and of the honour due to it, was no longer preserved in our age, except as a tradition of a bygone time; and yet this feeling of the greatness of a Christian, which the recent development of material life had lulled to sleep in the hearts of most men, started into vigorous action in the presence of the corpse of a priest. It was believed, as in the old days of faith, that the body sanctified by apostolic labour and penance must exhale a saving influence. It was deemed a happiness to possess the smallest portion of any article which had been used by the poor religious. Bequests of this nature poured in from the most remote provinces, and even from foreign countries. Many persons, who had been previously but little familiar with thoughts of the kind, felt themselves overpowered by a veneration which could not of course be called worship, but which was much more than respect.

To work conversion in souls is the noblest prerogative of sanctity: F. de Ravignan had possessed

this gift, up to his latest moment, and he did not lose it when the time of toil was passed. More than one person was seen to come away from praying beside the body, and throw himself in tears at the feet of a confessor. Thus the Apostle spoke and conquered even in death.

While the remains of the deceased were yet lying exposed in the lowly room in the Rue de Sèvres, he was brought forward in the towering pulpit of Notre-Dame as an example of the influence of holiness over the people. Under the vaulted roof that retained so many memories of him, and in the presence of so many souls who had formerly experienced in his words the prevailing might of the just man, his Brother, who had succeeded to his work, did not hesitate to speak thus in his praise :

“ Suppose that in some great city we meet with a man, placed by God as a shining light, a man whose virtue shone forth over the multitude with pure, unchanging lustre, who had ever presented in his own person a threefold likeness to our Lord Jesus Christ, when he brought to souls the truth which gives them light, the goodness which wins them over, and the sanctity by which they are edified ; a man to whom no one drew near without feeling raised up to something higher than the earth, whom no one quitted without carrying away some divine impression from contact with him ; a man who had bidden farewell to worldly greatness, and who, like his Master, went about doing good, and who died as he had lived, giving perfection to all the good that he had wrought ; a man, the unction of whose words had often thrilled and softened multitudes, but whose sweet memory still excites a deeper thrill and a more tender emotion ; a man who speaks louder in death than he spoke in life,—*Defunctus, adhuc loquitur*,—and who in his silence ceases not to instruct, to move,

and to sanctify all who give ear to the lesson taught by his death, the last discourse addressed by the dying Apostle to the world : a man, lastly, of whom it has been possible to say, that 'joy is mingled with the grief which he has left behind in the hearts of all that knew him : '—Will such a man, I ask, pass away without imparting to all that he has touched a movement towards what is lofty and grand ? How many thousands of souls will this one great soul raise in its passage ? What stimulus towards all good will thousands of hearts receive from their contact with his great heart ? Will it be denied that such a man has his part in purifying the people, in perfecting men and advancing society ? ”

A deputation, composed of persons of eminence, came to the Rue de Sèvres to ask the honour of piously bearing F. de Ravignan's coffin. The consent of the civil authorities was necessary. The mayor of the tenth *arrondissement* approved of this religious thought ; but he said that application must be made in a higher quarter, and at the same time his own advice was not to press the matter. No one, he remarked, could possibly find fault with the projected demonstration ; but the precedent might hereafter be quoted in support of other far less harmless displays. Thus prudence forbade the taking of any further step ; but we thought it right not to pass over in silence a circumstance, the remembrance of which will do honour to the memory of F. de Ravignan, and will be a comfort to those who, if only in desire, paid him this mark of respect.

Admiration and gratitude prompted the desire to surround the funeral with extraordinary pomp ; a plan was even proposed of the ceremony taking place in Notre-Dame, at the foot of the pulpit

which the great orator had adorned. F. Provincial applied to the Cardinal Archbishop, to save religious humility and the usages of the Society intact; F. de Ravignan had shared all things with his Brethren during his life, and he ought to have a humble burial like one of them. His Eminence entered into this pious wish; he consented that a poor funeral should be given to one who had embraced voluntary poverty; but as our Church of Jesus was not yet opened, he appointed for the ceremony the parish church of Saint-Sulpice, to which the Rue de Sèvres belonged: the chapter of the Cathedral would testify their gratitude by chanting the funeral service.

Providence seems sometimes to take a pleasure in unexpected reunions. Thirty-five years before, the son of the venerable M. Olier had given F. de Ravignan to the Society, and the Society was now to restore him, and beg for him a last benediction. No regret will be felt for the simplicity which marked the Apostle's closing triumph. All who witnessed it know that it was none the less glorious.

On the Monday, March the 1st, a multitude of persons filled the chamber of death. All wished to look once again on the revered features of the man of God before they disappeared for ever. These features would soon be marred in the humiliation of the sepulchre; but though more than sixty hours had passed since the soul had ceased to animate them, yet they had lost nothing of their noble expression. Throughout this long interval, in a moist atmosphere, which the concourse of visitors must have still further vitiated, corruption had refrained from touching them; and up to the very time when the corpse was laid upon the bier, the Brethren of the deceased could kiss his hands, and no sign announced the presence of the decom-

position which must soon begin. It seemed to be the will of God that this long exemption from decay should redound to the glory of the flesh which the spirit had reduced to obedience and had raised so high.

When the procession started, a striking contrast forced itself on the notice of all ; the simplicity of the hearse contrasted with the dignity that surrounded it. Two families followed the poor man's coffin, united to him by ties of blood and of religion. The Baron de Ravignan walked, leaning on the arm of the Superior. Behind them, with heads bare and in the deepest recollection, came an immense crowd of priests and laymen, in which all the ranks of society were mixed together. Nothing broke the silence but the sound of the bells of Saint-Sulpice, which seemed to be less a funeral toll than one of the joyous peals that usher in the great festivals of the Christian year. Long before the procession arrived, the church was as full as on any of the greatest feasts. M. Hamon, the Curé of Saint-Sulpice, complied with the wishes of the Society, but still wished to do honour to the Religious who had once dwelt in the solitude of Issy. The nave was left without any hangings, but a delicate allusion was seen in the crape which covered the pulpit.

Appropriate pieces of music were sung in the course of the simple Low Mass ; the Cardinal Archbishops of Paris and Bordeaux were present, together with the Bishop of Hetalonia, Coadjutor to the Bishop of Ajaccio ; the Bishop of Cybistra, Vicar Apostolic of Canton ; and the Bishop of Piblos, Vicar Apostolic of Cochín-China.

After the absolutions, given by the Archbishop of Paris himself, Mgr. Dupanloup, the Bishop of Orleans, mounted the pulpit, dressed in deepest mourning. His attendance had not been expected, and it filled the hearts of all present with deep

emotion. For a few moments he gazed on the coffin and the assembly with a sort of bewilderment, and then he gave out his text: *Defunctus, adhuc loquitur!* "He is there; he is dead; and he still speaks to you." This gaze, this silence, and these opening words, stamped with an impress of majesty, derived from death, brought to our minds the exordium of Massillon's discourse before the catafalque of Louis XIV.

The orator had need of some moments' delay to calm his own agitation, excited by the presence of his friend's remains. When he had regained the mastery over his sobs and his voice, he exclaimed:—

"What shall I say that can correspond to the regret you feel, to your tears, your vows, your remembrances, and hopes, and all the thoughts that crowd your hearts? What shall I say beyond those words: He is there; he is dead; and he still speaks to you? *Defunctus, adhuc loquitur!*

"What shall I say to your Eminence, that can correspond to the honour and consolation given by your presence, and for your own consolation at this moment when that great voice, ever so devoted to the Church, is hushed within your diocese? What shall I say, beyond what St Paul has said before me: Yes, yes, he is still speaking, and by the undying influence of so holy a memory, he will speak for ever. *Defunctus, adhuc loquitur!*

"And what shall I say to correspond with the matchless pomp of this funeral, with this pious and noble gathering, assembled on the present solemn occasion? What shall I say to give some solace to so many hearts full of trouble, light to so many hopes, except I use these words of the Apostle: From the bosom of God, from the glory of eternity, he whom we lament still speaks to us? *Defunctus, adhuc loquitur!*

"Yes, it has been well done to banish from this

place all emblems of death, all the panoply of woe. I am well pleased that this church retains its wonted splendour, and that no mourning-hangings are seen. What have we to do—he and you and I—what have we to do with ‘titles and inscriptions, emblems of grief for him that is no more?’ He is living! ‘With the weeping forms that surround a tomb?’ Our own tears are enough! ‘With the empty signs of a sorrow which, like all things else, passes away with time?’ Our sorrow, our regret, and our love survive all. What should we have had to do with all these trophies raised to Death, while we are celebrating one of these blessed ends in which Death is vanquished? while your recollection and your prayers, your unforced enthusiasm felt by all, are a suitable accompaniment of mourning to the revered remains which are in our midst?

“I have no blame for the Brethren of the great orator, the great apologist for religion, whose wish it has been that he should be forgotten here, and buried as it were in all the humility of his vows, and of his hidden life. I blame them not; but you are of his family, you too are his children and his friends, and I applaud you for resolving to render such homage to his memory, and for throwing so rare a splendour around his life and death.

“Oh, my holy friend, this is the first time that speaking of you I have ventured to pronounce the name of glory! Never could I have ventured to use it during the course of that life of saintly and true glory, during those long and happy conversations which will remain a lasting solace to my soul throughout my toilsome pilgrimage in this world. No, never did I use this word with you! You would have forced me to be silent. And even this day, though your soul, looking on me, and listening from the gates of a better life, may have pardon and excuse for me, yet I fear that these mortal

relics, which are still enduring the humiliation of the tomb—that these bones, now broken and humbled, but which shall one day leap with joy in the divine land—I fear that they may start with astonishment at the sound of my words : that these ears which were always closed to words of vanity will still refuse to listen : that these lips, never opened but with words of humility, will utter against me some loving reproach. I would not wish that you should find aught to reproach in me this day ; I would not add sorrow to the humiliation of the coffin ; I will respect you in death no less than I respected you in life ; I will say no more of glory ; I will leave that care to others. I will speak only of life and immortality ; I will ascribe to you nothing but the eternal beatitude of heaven. No other praise shall be given by me to-day to the humble religious, to the poor man of Jesus Christ.

“ The beatitudes announced by the divine Master in the Gospel found their place in the faithful disciple. By voluntary poverty, by the obscure life of obedience in religion, he has made the Kingdom of Heaven his own.

“ In virtue of his meekness, he possesses the earth. The great law of the moral and eternal order was accomplished in him : Meekness sprang from strength. *De forti egressa est dulcedo.*

“ He thirsted after justice, and thus deserved to have his fill. Love of justice was the very foundation of his soul ; this love at first inclined him towards the career of the magistracy ; but he soon quitted the courts of human justice, holy as it is, that he might deal out to souls a better justice still.

“ He was worthy of the mercy promised to the merciful, of the comfort, the sure portion of them that weep. He was an Apostle and a Saviour of

souls, and how much wretchedness has he relieved ! how much love has he bestowed on sinners : how many tears has he dried up ! how many has he consoled in sickness ! how many has he assisted at the hour of death ! how many strifes has he calmed ! how much sorrow has he assuaged in the course of his noble ministry ! As he dried the tears of others, tears fell from his own eyes.

“And may we not also say of him : ‘Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God ?’ What heart was purer than his, and how happy was he in his life of religious, priestly chastity !

“After the great and memorable struggles carried on by him of old in defence of liberty of instruction and religious liberty, that other beatitude must needs be his ; yes, you are blessed when men speak against you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, *dixerunt omne malum adversum vos mentientes*, falsely, for the sake of My Name which you bear, *propter Nomen Meum* : rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great shall be your reward in heaven : *Ecce enim merces vestra copiosa est in cœlis.*”

After passing in review the life of the apostolic man and true companion of Jesus, showing that recompense went along with labour, the eloquent preacher closed his discourse with these lines :—

“And now I conclude, joining with you in chanting a last beatitude, the canticle and the beatitude of death : song surpassing all songs, which the traditions of men know not, and which the voice of a God Who died, alone could be the first to utter. Blessed are the dead ! *Beati mortui !* Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord ! *Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur !*

“For, as the sacred text adds, the Holy Spirit the Spirit of meekness and love, announces to them rest from their labours : *Dicit Spiritus ut*

requiescant a laboribus suis. Let us proclaim that he has well earned this rest. Let us proclaim that he was worthy to hear these words of consolation. Let us proclaim that this repose was well deserved by the generous labourer, the unwearied preacher of the gospel, and that after having borne the burden and heat of the day, he will be happy in the bosom of God, surrounded by joy and brightness! It is for you to give this word its full accomplishment, for the Spirit of God adds, *Opéra illorum sequuntur illos*—Their works follow them. You are his work, the work for which he gave his life, his heart, his blood; it is your task to follow him, to accompany him to the presence of God, and there one day to meet him again. Delay not on your road: he marched at your head; follow him to the end: he has given you a *rendezvous* in the Kingdom of Heaven; fail not to reach it, fail not. When he appointed you a meeting-place in this world, you know how great was his punctuality; fail not in keeping his last appointment with you.

“But moreover, at this parting hour, weep not for him. We miss him truly, but he is living! He is not dead, for it is written: If the just man die, he dies not, but he receives refreshment, rest, and light from death; *Iustus si morte præoccupatus fuerit, in refrigerio erit.* The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and the torment of death touches them not. *Iustorum animæ in manu Dei sunt et non tanget illos tormentum mortis.* In the eyes of fools, of those who have not the wisdom that comes from God, they seem to die, and their death is esteemed an affliction; yet it is nothing but a road to leave our life, which is the true death, and to enter on what is really life: *Visi sunt oculis insipientium mori et æstimata est afflictio exitus illorum. A nobis est iter.* And their hope beyond

the tomb is full of immortality ; *Spes illorum immortalitate plena est.*

“ Weep not, then, for him. He is living, and soon we shall see him again : yes, we shall again see the bright, deep, pure glance of his eye ; we shall again see his calm and noble forehead. I saw him not many days since ; he was already wrapped in the arms of death, and rays of glory seemed to shine forth from the pale forehead ; the brightness of immortality glowed from the depths of those eyes which seemed to lose their lustre ; behind them I saw the splendour of the glory of heaven. . . . You will once more hear his frank, generous, firm, and tender voice. You will press those kind and affectionate hands, which have so often welcomed you tenderly, which have touched your hands, and which have been raised above your heads to impart blessings. You will see him open those lips, so full of love, which have so often pronounced over you the words of pardon. You will again meet, and will understand better than here below, that great heart which beat strong and generous in his feeble breast ; which broke it before the time ; that heart which lives, and which by my mouth says to you, I live : *Ego vivo* ; and you, my friends, my children, you too shall live, if you will. I live ! *Ego vivo, et vos vivetis.* The life I lead is no longer the life of death and misery, which is no true life ; I live a life in grace and justice ; and, if you will, you shall one day live there with me. *Ego vivo, et vos vivetis.*

“ And, now, I have but one word left to say, the word of separation and sorrow, the word of last and solemn farewell. Oh, my holy friend, we must leave you. Farewell, then, in the name of all that loved you. Farewell, in the name of the Holy Church, of whom you were the courageous champion, for whose defence you fought the good fight

so valiantly. Farewell, in the name of this Church militant, which, at this hour when I speak, is introducing you into the bosom of the Church triumphant. The Apostles and the Martyrs, the Bishops and the Evangelists, and the Queen of Apostles and Martyrs, whom you loved so well, come to greet you and receive you to their company. Farewell, in the name of the Church, our Mother!

“Farewell, in the name of the Church of France, whose servant you were, so strong and so humble, for whom you have gained so many victories, striking down, by your lofty character and generous words, the vile standard of human respect from so many hands, and replacing it by the standard of the Cross.

“Farewell, in the name of the Bishops of France, who found in you a sure friend, trustworthy and unassuming. I feel sure that they will deem me happy to have had the opportunity of offering in their name this last and solemn proof of respect.

“Farewell, in the name of that holy Society—if I may be allowed to speak in her name—whose shield and buckler you have been, and whose glory you will ever be.

“Farewell, in the name of all the brave Christians who gathered round you, have fought in your company, and who have earned your esteem and pious friendship, even to the end.

“Farewell, in the name of the youth of France, so full of generosity and ardour for good, when in the hands of worthy guides. Continue to be their protector and guide in the heavenly abode to which your virtues, by God’s grace, have carried your soul.

“Farewell, in the name of the multitude of souls who were dear alike to you and to me. Continue to bless them, never cease from blessing them.

“And if I may be allowed to speak of myself : Farewell, in the name of one of those old friendships which begin in the days of youth, which know no disturbance, and which in the heart of the survivor live unimpaired, until the whole power of the soul is impaired, and it can utter no more than the last inspired word with which this discourse shall close : ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord !’ *Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur.* May my soul die the death of the just, and may my end be like his. *Moriatur anima mea morte justorum !*”

No funeral discourse was ever more affecting ; for never did the heart of a friend speak language more sincere and eloquent, more simple and beautiful.

On leaving the church, an imposing sight met the eyes of all. The Place Saint-Sulpice was covered with a crowd of people, all bare-headed, and standing in the deepest silence. They had been awaiting the end of the ceremony, having been unable to find room in the vast edifice, the very portico of which was full.

The procession, thus augmented, wound through the widest streets towards the Cemetery of Mont-Parnasse. There the Curé of Saint-Sulpice yielded to the Provincial the right of blessing, in the name of the Church, the open grave where many Fathers of the Society already lay. A moment afterwards all was over ; the earth covered the mortal remains of the Apostle, and the multitude dispersed in silence.

How eloquent a sermon did this sight afford ! What deep lessons were carried away by so many chosen minds and hearts ! How great was the glory of the willing embracer of poverty !

In closing this history, let us listen to the words

of an eye-witness, the Prince Albert de Broglie, who wrote as follows in the *Journal des Débats*, a month after this public homage rendered to the Apostle of Notre-Dame :—

“F. de Ravignan found popularity in death : few persons have taken more care to avoid it during life. By his retreat into the cloister he escaped the celebrity which was beginning for him : by putting on the habit of a Jesuit he set himself upon a pinnacle against which for ages past all the darts of satire had been openly directed ; one day only did he come down to mingle eagerly in hot debate. Yet the result of all this, of a life spent in opposing the most wide-spread opinions, has been true popularity : there were more tears shed, more sincere regret felt, around his tomb than will perhaps fall to the lot of any of his contemporaries ; one harmonious burst of praise, in which not one voice was wanting. The power of his character blotted out all recollections, the sweet odour of his virtue scattered them as a smoke. To express a justly admiring estimate of him, we have no need to ask for leave from his adversaries of old : we need only answer their appeal. . . .

“F. de Ravignan was set apart to prove to us, that alone perhaps of all the forms of moral greatness, Christian holiness has lost nothing of its influence in our times, and does its work on souls without requiring to be wrapped up in the midst of a distant age. How many eminent men of our day have complained that, in face of an age which has lost all illusion, and in the light of a pitiless publicity, greatness has become impossible ; that the multitude have become incapable of that degree of illusion which alone made it possible to subdue and guide them ! But if heroes feel the want of the age of poetry, and regret its loss, saints find no necessity for legend. The greatness which springs

from constant purity of thought, and minute perfection in every action, bears the closest scrutiny, and to be placed in the most brilliant light.

“F. de Ravignan’s room in the Rue de Sèvres, in the nineteenth century, brought back to us the scenes that passed in the cells of the Thebaid. In that room we watched while, during long days of agony, suffering was received with relish, as the trial which prepared the way for deliverance; we saw the dart of Death broken, a foretaste enjoyed of the beatitude of heaven. Those who made their way into this shrine came back filled with an admiration which they could not restrain; and their expressions reminded us of the cry which once broke forth on the banks of the Nile: ‘I have seen Elias, I have seen John in the desert, I have seen Paul in paradise.’

“And then, on the morrow of his death, came the triumphal procession, than which no proof of feeling of the people has ever been more hearty or more affecting. Shall I publish the strange thought which passed suddenly across my mind on that morning of the 1st of March, as I watched the whole neighbourhood in excitement, awaiting the funeral of a priest? I asked myself what would have been the fate of F. de Ravignan had he not, once for all, given his whole life to God, and spent it piecemeal upon his brethren; if he had reserved it to himself, cultivating the talents which he received from nature, and following the career of honour which opened before him. What fortune would have awaited him? His life would, perhaps, have been longer, for he would have been spared the labours of the apostolate. But what party would have had the support of his eloquence in the rapid changes of our revolutions? If bound to the service of France, carried along in the quick succession of her fortunes, would he not have suffered

from her fits of dislike? Would he have succeeded in securing her favour and esteem even to the end, throughout the course of repeated alternations? would he have made and kept his own these two gifts which the capricious mistress does not always confer upon the same person. F. de Ravignan uttered but one single vow, professed but one faith, served but one Master; he has died with the love of many, the respect of all. Who can deny that, even though we look only to glory and happiness, he yet has chosen the better part?"

After quoting this magnificent panegyric, and on closing this history, what remains for me to do but to raise my eyes to Heaven, and exclaim, "Oh, my Father, your glory is noble, and is holy. You spent your life in the struggle against the passions of the world, in combating its ideas and maxims, and the world was forced to grant you its admiration. Poor world! it executes justice upon itself when it honours those by whom it is despised!"

"For my part, in telling of the combats you supported, I have not sought to add to that earthly glory for which you felt so thorough a contempt; I have merely noticed it in passing, as the homage which holiness exacts even from those who fail to comprehend it.

"I have spoken in order to give consolation to souls in whom contact with your soul has produced the veneration of piety, and an admiration not without fruit. They know that when your ears closed to all earthly applause, to which your heart never gave heed, while, in the words of the wise man, '*To the eyes of fools you seemed to die, you entered on eternal peace and life*;' like our divine Master, you might say, on leaving them, '*You know whither I go, and the road you know*.' My dearly beloved Father, continue to watch over the souls so cherished by you in this world. Finish

the work of your life begun in them; from the height of that heavenly glory whither our hopes follow you, still impart to them of the faith which was yours here below, that they may know that glory; your affection, that they may advance towards it; and your help, that they may reach the goal!"

THE END.

922.241

10,913

Ponlevoy, Father De

AUTHOR

The Life of Father De Ravignan, S.J.

TITLE

DATE
LOANED

BORROWER'S NAME

DATE
RETURNED

SEP 20 1985

R18

ST. ALBERT'S COLLEGE LIBRARY

